

A Practical Theology of Church and World:
Ecclesiology and Social Vision in 20th Century Scotland

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Abstract

The strong emphasis on ecclesiology in the work of Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank and others associated with ‘the new ecclesiology’¹ brings theological challenges to the contemporary move to recast practical theology’s attention to church and society as ‘public theology’. A historical reading of three key examples of practice in the tradition of twentieth century Scottish reformed-ecumenical reflection on ‘church and society’ displays a rich seam of reflection on ecclesiology, with some significant affinities to ‘the new ecclesiology’. The work of Stanley Hauerwas is used to develop a critical reading of the practices of theology and the theologies of (church and world) practice embedded in each example. This leads to the claim that ‘the new ecclesiology’ offers practical theology a way of articulating the church-world relationship and expressing the social, political and cultural witness of Christianity within Scotland which is to be preferred to the rubric of ‘public theology’. Its appeal for practical theology in the face of church decline and the marginalisation of theological discourse within liberal culture lies not in a temptation towards the comforts of “sectarianism”, but in its confession of the “ironic” character of the politics of Jesus and the reign of God. Its promise for practical theology lies in its claim to offer a narrative display of how theology as “church pragmatics” can mediate a fruitful social, political and cultural imagining of the world Scotland is and the world it is called to be.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that it is my own work.

Douglas C Gay

¹ The term “new ecclesiology” is applied to different groups of theologians by recent commentators e.g. Nicholas Healy in his 2003 article “Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness” (IJST Vol 5, No 3, Nov 2003) mentions George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, Stanley Hauerwas, Kathryn Tanner, Greg Jones & Bruce Marshall “and many others”. I would argue that the work of John Howard Yoder, James McLendon, John Milbank and more recently Miroslav Volf and Reinhard Hütter also belong within a first list of the names of those writing in English who are re-focussing theological attention on the practices of the ‘concrete church’ and on the ‘public’ character of ecclesiology.

Introduction

Questions of the nature, scope and methodology of practical theology remain highly contested.² While very few voices will now seek to characterise it solely in terms of an older ‘clerical paradigm’³, considerable differences remain between those who wish to emphasise its character as an ecclesial discipline and those who prefer to emphasise its character as ‘public theology’.⁴

Problems of definition are accentuated by the various critical debates which overlap within the field: oppositions between liberal and conservative theological positions, liberal and conservative political positions, liberation and systematic methodological approaches have been further ‘scrambled’ by debates about postmodernism.⁵ The extent of this methodological and orientational flux means that all work in practical theology involves critical judgments and choices about the questions at stake. Self-evidently, these arise out of critical reflection on past theological practice, although they may opt to mediate contemporary critical discussions and therefore focus on the very recent past. In this discussion, I take a longer view with a critical account of theological practice which ranges from the 1930s to the 1990s. This ‘historical’ approach, while vulnerable to the familiar charge of ‘finding what you look for’, aims to illuminate contemporary debates about method and orientation by mapping a ‘local’ (Scottish) tradition within global practical theology and by paying close and critical attention to that tradition. My reading of the work of Stanley Hauerwas is placed at the beginning of the thesis to make clear that it is functioning as a provisional hermeneutic for the historical account which follows. However, the intention has been to create a mutually critical dialogue in which the three studies of Scottish theological practice also point up weaknesses and omissions in Hauerwas’ theological project. The final chapter draws together my conclusions about the

² On contemporary currents in Practical Theology see Woodward & Pattison ed. 2000; Heitink 1999 with series intro by Browning, Farley et al.; Ballard, P. & Pritchard, J. 1996

³ see e.g. Edward Farley’s essay in Browning 1983

⁴ These are best understood as “emphases” and, as will be seen in Chapter Five below, are not necessarily mutually exclusive terms.

⁵ On the impact of postmodernism on practical theology see Graham in Woodward & Pattison Eds. 2000, p 108

outcome of this dialogue and locates them within a broader contemporary debate about theology, ecclesiology and practice.

Specifically, this thesis is concerned with how Reformed-Ecumenical practical theology in Scotland gives an account of the relationship between church and world. It explores this problematic by offering a critical account of three key historical examples of theological practice in the period 1940 to 2000 and of the work of key animating figures associated with them: the Church of Scotland's Wartime Commission On The Interpretation of God's Will and John Baillie (1940-45), the work of Scottish Churches House and Ian Fraser (1960-1969) and the work of the Centre For Theology and Public Issues and Duncan Forrester (1984-2000). While each of these initiatives was led by a Church of Scotland minister who believed the dominant Reformed tradition needed to be supplemented by the developing ecumenical movement, each had a different location: the first within a church, the second between churches, the third within the academy and each of them addressed a different era of modern Scottish life.

All of these identifying features are significant for the work of this thesis. As a minister of the Church of Scotland and then of the United Reformed Church I wanted to map a twentieth century tradition of practical theology which was recognisable as a significant tradition within the Church of Scotland, but which also understood itself in ecumenical terms. As a lay person, then minister and then theological researcher within the academy I wanted to explore and display the scope of practical theology in relation to the rhetorical and institutional 'domains'⁶ of church, academy and society. As an advocate of an approach to ecclesiology primarily associated in contemporary theology with anglo-catholic and radical reformation traditions, I wanted to trace parallels and precedents within the Scottish reformed tradition.

⁶ David Tracy would of course describe these as 'publics', a rubric which I find unhelpful because I argue that the term 'public' needs to undergo a theological/ecclesiological disruption and challenge. This line is developed more fully in Chapter five below.

In the work of American theologian Stanley Hauerwas, hailed by some as 'prophetic' and denounced by others as 'sectarian', ecclesiology and social ethics are associated in ways which appear to challenge the dominant narratives of their relation within the Reformed tradition in Scotland. Hauerwas places ecclesiology at the centre of theology and his work seeks to defend and display the claims that the church is epistemologically, axiologically (ethically) and politically prior to the world. He argues in his 2001 Gifford Lectures that as the church seeks to bear faithful witness in the world, it should learn from the discipleship of four faithful witnesses: Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, John Paul II and Dorothy Day. The ability of the church and its theologians to know the world truthfully and to act in it faithfully is dependent on 'the church being the church' in its knowing and acting.

In my discussion of John Baillie and the Baillie Commission, I argue that we find a striking example of reformed/ecumenical ecclesiology presented as a challenge to the hermeneutical ambitions of historiography, political theory and social science and an implicit vision of an ecclesial (practical) theology as itself a primary form of each of those discourses. However, I also argue that the Baillie Commission's reading of and prescriptions for Scottish society are seriously weakened by their inability to imagine the future of 'Christendom' beyond the terms of the 1929 church-state settlement.

In my discussion of Ian Fraser and Scottish Churches House, I argue that we encounter a notable ecumenical attempt to perform the vision of the Baillie Commission, which challenges and supplements the location of theology within the Scottish academy/university and its character as predominantly a clerical/ministerial/academic practice by developing a new location for theology in Scotland within an ecumenical centre and a new character for it as primarily the practice of reflection by lay people on their ministry within church and society. However, I argue that Fraser's vision and the work of Scottish Churches House are

weakened by an overly romantic and optimistic vision of the capacities of organised socialism and the welfare state to promote 'kingdom' change in Scottish society. The model developed at Scottish Churches' House was unable to find an institutional form which could extend it and decentralise it within the life of the Scottish churches more generally.

In my discussion of Duncan Forrester and CTPI, I argue that Forrester's work represented a decisive politicisation of the agenda of academic practical/theology within Scotland, which proposed that a centre such as CTPI could promote the renewal of Christian social vision, serving the church from within the academy and encouraging the development of an indigenous liberation theology for the UK (Scotland), within a global, ecumenical context. However, I will argue that this project has been disrupted by the post-1989/postmodern crisis of 'socialism' and by postmodern, postcolonial challenges to singular conceptions of 'the public realm'. Forrester's work has also remained at a certain distance from congregational practice within Scotland and has struggled to articulate the connections between 'social vision' in the elite discourse of CTPI and the missional practice of local churches.

Drawing these threads together, I consider the important recent contributions made to the development of this tradition in the work of Will Storrar and David Fergusson while arguing that the Reformed tradition of practical theology needs to be more attentive to the specific ecclesiological and ethical supplements offered by Hauerwas' mediation of the traditions of the Radical Reformation if it is to contribute to the work of faithful witness in a post-christendom Scotland.

The radical reforming of Reformed ecclesiology suggested by this is not anti-ecumenical. However, it disrupts the ecumenical agenda in distinctive ways, rejecting the 1929 National Church formula while urging the Church of Scotland towards a politicised disestablishment, in which it can learn to inhabit the complex

and plural 'public' spaces of a post-modern and post-secular⁷ Scotland in ways pioneered by the Roman Catholic Church and other minority traditions, both Christian and non-Christian. Its intent is missional, catholic⁸ and anti-secularist. It renounces a Christendom based upon violence in order to seek a new and 'peaceable' vision of Christendom through non-violent witness to the people of Scotland. This, like the catholicity of the church is recognised as an eschatological vision, but one which should similarly exercise a decisive influence on the churches' practice in the present.

⁷ On the 'post-secular' see Blond's introduction to Blond ed. 1998 and Elaine Graham in Woodward & Pattison Eds. 2000, 108; see also Smith 2004 pp31-62

⁸ See Volf 1998a on a suggestive formulation of catholicity which aims to be inclusive of 'free' churches

CHAPTER ONE

The Epistemological, Ethical and Political Priority of the Church

The Post-Christendom Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas

In this chapter I argue that Stanley Hauerwas is a key interlocutor for Scottish practical theology and that the primary challenge he brings has to do with the place given to ecclesiology within the theological task. Hauerwas' theological project is conceived on a grand scale. He understands it as a continuation and a development of Karl Barth's theological challenge to the project of the European Enlightenment.¹

What is most distinctive about Hauerwas' approach is that he takes three central questions of the European Enlightenment – how do we know, how should we live and how should the world be organised politically – and argues that the church is central to how these questions are to be answered. I will argue that it is in the radical nature of his reformulation of how these questions must be answered that his principal challenge to Scottish 'public' theology is delivered.

After a brief introduction to Hauerwas' work, I highlight three key ecclesial confessions in Hauerwas' theology which address these questions. These are that:

- *The Church tells the world's story (not vice-versa)*
- *The Church does not have but is a social ethic*
- *The Church is an alternative politics to the politics of the world*

I then consider the major criticisms made of Hauerwas' approach and offer an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, finally proposing and commending it as a provisional hermeneutic for the subsequent historical examples of the thesis.

¹ This understanding of his work is set out most clearly in his 2001 Gifford Lectures, published as *With the Grain of the Universe*, see Hauerwas 2001.

Introducing Hauerwas

Hauerwas has been formally inserted into the Scottish tradition of theological reflection by the invitation to deliver the Gifford Lectures in 2001, now published as *With The Grain of the Universe*². This followed on two decades of interest in and engagement with his work by theologians within Scotland.

I have not attempted to offer an in depth account of how Hauerwas' thinking has evolved over the past three decades. This is already well covered in the secondary literature from various more and less sympathetic perspectives.³ My concern is to identify themes in Hauerwas' 'mature' work which pose fruitful questions to Scottish practical theology.

Outline Biography

Stanley Hauerwas was born into a working-class Methodist family in Texas in 1940. He studied theology at Yale, where he took his PhD in 1968 and taught theology from 1970 at the Roman Catholic University of Notre Dame. In 1985 he moved to become Professor of Theological Ethics in the Divinity School and later also a Professor of Law at Duke University in South Carolina, where he still teaches.

Hauerwas is a prolific writer, who admits he has been criticised for writing 'too much, too quickly'. His favoured forms are the essay and the article, with more than 350 published in the past three decades. He identifies himself primarily as a 'theologian' rather than an ethicist, but eschews the description 'systematic' and the kind of methodology which would attach to it.

² Hauerwas 2001

³ see Albrecht 1995; Rasmusson 1995; Wells, 1998 which also contains a comprehensive bibliography of Hauerwas's writings to 1998; see also Berkman and Cavanaugh's introductions to *The Hauerwas Reader* 2001, Cartwright's *Reader's Guide* and Berkman and Fodor's *Selected Annotated Bibliography 1971-2001* in the same volume.

His intellectual journey is well documented and described in his own writings.⁴ At Yale he was influenced by Barth and Wittgenstein and began his exploration of Aristotelian-Thomistic themes of character and virtue, in dialogue with and often in contra-distinction to the Protestant ethics of the Niebuhrs. At Notre-Dame, the work of Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder became a seminal influence along with the work of Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck and baptist theologian James McClendon. Since moving to Duke, notable influences on Hauerwas have included English theologian John Milbank and Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. Footnotes to his books and essays reveal an expansive and catholic engagement with contemporary scholars from Mennonites to Thomists, with wide reading outside of theology and ethics, but the names mentioned are major landmarks on any map of his journey.

A description of that journey in terms of themes rather than influences has a recognisable shape. Sam Wells suggests a four-part structure to the ‘story of Hauerwas’ theological ethics’; that it moves from quandary to character, from character to story, from story to community and from community to church.⁵ Wells is a skilful reader and summariser of Hauerwas, who calls Wells’ book “extraordinarily illuminating”⁶ and is eager to credit Wells with adding value to his own work. I am unconvinced that Wells differentiation between his third and fourth stages stands up to scrutiny, but if these two stages are merged into a third move from story to church, his summary plot of Hauerwas’ development is helpful:

The journey from character to community (via narrative) is part of a longer journey from quandary to the Church (via character, narrative and community). This latter journey sums up Hauerwas’ whole project. His overall concern is to shift the focus of ethical reflection from the individual in a crisis to the Church in its faithfulness. The purpose of theological ethics, for him, is not to make quandaries easier, but to build up the Church.

Narrative is at the centre of both the smaller journey, character to community and the larger journey, individual to Church. It is the stage at which Hauerwas’ ethics become truly

⁴ see his contribution to the famous *How My Mind Has Changed* series in *The Christian Century* 107, 7 1990: 212-16; also essays *In Good Company* 1995, for reflections on his time at Notre Dame.

⁵ Wells 1998

⁶ Hauerwas 2003, 182, n4

theological. Narrative starts as a helpful way of displaying the character of an individual: and ends by revealing the character of God.⁷

My discussion engages Hauerwas through two principal primary texts: *After Christendom?* (first published in 1991 and re-issued in 1999 with a new preface) and *With The Grain of The Universe* (2001). These texts have been chosen for several reasons. First, I wanted to focus on Hauerwas' later thought, on his 'mature' theological positions. He is a thinker who, while he has never lost interest in his earliest themes, thrives on the give and take of academic debate and dialogue and is constantly seeking to revise and improve his work in the light of criticism. The second reason is that they are both discrete books as opposed to collections of essays and represent sustained and connected examples of Hauerwas' thinking. Lastly, they both originated in comparable contexts – as lecture series delivered outwith North America, on the basis of a brief to speak to a 'public' beyond the Christian Church – with one of those contexts being Scotland. While these texts are in the foreground of my discussion of his position, I also refer to a wide range of Hauerwas' other writings throughout the text.

The Centrality of Ecclesiology and Three Key Confessions About The Church

Three twentieth century Christian thinkers have had a decisive influence on Hauerwas' understanding of the theological task – the theologians Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder and the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre.

Above all, from Barth Hauerwas has learned to do theology in an anti-foundationalist way, emphasising the priority of theology over philosophy, that no foundation can be laid other than Jesus Christ.⁸ The highest role theology can aspire to is that of a 'witness'⁹ who confesses the faith once delivered to the saints

⁷ Wells 1998, 61

⁸ so IGC Ch 2 "The Church's One Foundation Is Jesus Christ Her Lord or In A World without Foundations All We Have Is The Church"

⁹ c.f. Joseph Mangina's 2004 title: *Karl Barth, theologian of Christian Witness*; Mangina 2004

as the story which, by telling the truth about God as Trinity, also tells the truth about how things are in the world and how we should live before God.

Above all, from MacIntyre Hauerwas has learned what a philosophy posterior to theology should look like. Freed from the task of competing with revelation to establish another foundation for knowledge, it can serve revelation by reasoning in ways which put secular and atheistic accounts of the world into “epistemological crisis”¹⁰ and by displaying the ways in which, without God, the world is unintelligible to itself.

Above all, from Yoder Hauerwas has learned that the claims of theology must be displayed in the practice of the church, whose discipleship as a ‘body politic’ witnesses to the non-violent ‘politics of Jesus’ in the world and whose eschatological confidence in the Resurrection calls it to cruciform faithfulness rather than secular effectiveness.¹¹

That way of characterising Hauerwas’ position has its own merits; he is a theologian who is always eager to pay his debts and honour his teachers. However, based on my reading of his work, in particular of the two texts mentioned above, I want to argue for a more synthetic characterisation of Hauerwas’ theology – by explicating one of his most condensed programmatic statements in terms of three theological confessions about the church.

The Centrality of the Church

The significance of the church is a theme which has gathered momentum in Hauerwas’ writings over the years, to the point where it now stands at the centre of

¹⁰ The phrase is MacIntyre’s – see n4, 208 in Hauerwas 2001 (*With The Grain Of The Universe*)

¹¹ PK Hauerwas 1999, xxiv: “Yoder was a pill I had no desire to swallow. His ecclesiology could not work apart from his understanding of Jesus and the centrality of non-violence as the hallmark of the Christian life.”

his thinking.¹² In his 1995 essay collection, *In Good Company*, Hauerwas while recognising that “for many... to make the church the center of Christian life and thought seems either hopelessly idealistic or naïve, given the “empirical realities” of most churches particularly in America”¹³, argues that “all theology must begin and end with ecclesiology”¹⁴.

In a 2003 review article on *With The Grain of the Universe*, Stanley Grenz comments that despite Hauerwas offering the role to Karl Barth, the real hero of his narrative is ‘the church’.¹⁵ There is significant continuity between *After Christendom?* and *With The Grain of the Universe* in the place given to the church, although the first tends to focus on the exemplary character of the church’s witness and the second develops more fully the ‘evidential’ role played by that witness. However, both notes are there in both books and are mutually involving.

The church is entrusted by Jesus with the gospel and commissioned to bear witness in the power of the Spirit to all nations until the end of the age. Hauerwas would see no theological contradiction in Kähler's famous observation that “Jesus preached the kingdom and the church came”. As Sam Wells points out, reading Hauerwas helped him see that “God intended the church”. God intended the Church, Jesus founded the Church, the Spirit enables the Church – God has elected that the world should know God and itself through the witness of Israel and the Church.¹⁶

¹² Some critics, including David Fergusson have argued that the church effectively occupies the theological space which should belong to Jesus Christ. I return to this criticism at the end of the chapter. See Fergusson 1998, pp62-72.; Stephen Webb makes the interesting observation that “More substantially, Niebuhr did for anthropology, the popular doctrine of his day, what Hauerwas has done for ecclesiology, *the doctrine of today*.” First Things 124 (June/July 2002): 12-14. (emphasis added)

¹³ Hauerwas 1995 4

¹⁴ Hauerwas 1995 58

¹⁵ 385 “Stanley Hauerwas, the grain of the universe, and the most ‘natural’ natural theology” SJT 56 (3) 381-386 (2003)

¹⁶ Hauerwas 2003: 97, 98, 99

That the Church is a witness is a correlate of God's freedom and the absence of necessity in creation and redemption. *How* the Church is a witness is modelled determinatively in the history of Jesus, which the Church repeats non-identically in its pilgrimage through its history.

The crucial area in which Hauerwas wants to push beyond Barth is ecclesiology, where he believes Barth is insufficiently catholic and insufficiently Anabaptist. At the close of *With the Grain of the Universe*, there are three witnesses left centre stage – Barth, Yoder and John Paul II – representatives of the three major theological strands of the Reformation schism.¹⁷

Three Key Confessions: Theology Entails An Ethics and a Politics

In *With The Grain of the Universe*, Hauerwas argues that “theology entails an ethics and a politics”.¹⁸ The church in Hauerwas’ thought is a socio-political, ethical and epistemological necessity if Christianity is true, and these three dimensions of its existence are ultimately one in its witness. This summary statement of Hauerwas’ position is what I now want to expand in terms of three ecclesiological confessions which are prominent in his work.

1. The Church Tells The World’s Story¹⁹ (It is an Epistemology)

One of Hauerwas’ most memorable formulations of this confession comes in an essay entitled *No Enemy, No Christianity*, included in his 1998 collection *Sanctify Them In The Truth*:

¹⁷ IGC Hauerwas 1995, 62: “As Free Church Catholics we [Hauerwas and Willimon] think we stand in a particular position to help bind up the wounds of the Reformation.”; *ibid* 71: “In brief, what I think is happening is that we are coming to the end of what Tillich called “the Protestant era”. The differences created by the Reformation.. are no simply no longer interesting, given the challenges before Christians in modernity.”

¹⁸ WGU 16; AC

¹⁹ This is my phrase, which I believe summarises his position

Israel and the church are not characters in a larger story called 'world', but rather 'world' is a character in God's story as known through the story that is the church. Without the church there is no world to have a story.²⁰

Hauerwas' decision for the language of story dates back to the 1970s, but his understanding of how that language should be deployed within theology has changed over time. While his early work on Barth²¹ and Wittgenstein²² at Yale was influential, his decisive move towards a non-foundationalist or post-liberal position takes place in the early 1980s.²³ Sam Wells addresses this transition in Hauerwas' thinking about narrative in the period 1981 to 1985 in terms of two understandings of narrative: 'narrative from below' and 'narrative from above'.²⁴ In his earlier work, Hauerwas had embraced what Wells terms a 'narrative from below' position as a way of locating the ethical self within historical existence. His work was influenced and focussed by that of his Notre Dame colleague, Scots philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, whose massively influential *After Virtue* (1981) made the terms story/narrative central to his account of moral formation and moral reasoning.²⁵ The

²⁰ Hauerwas, 1998 p192; contra Fergusson (ref?) Hauerwas notes the similarity between his position here and that of Robert Jenson in 'How the World Lost Its Story' *First Things* 36 (October 1993), 19-24; cf also IGC 33 n4. "There is no world unless there is a church, nor can the world have a history without the church. That is why the church knows the world better than the world can know itself."

²¹ The modern (or even some would argue post-modern) tradition of non-foundationalist theology begins effectively with Karl Barth in the 1930s and is announced in his preface to *Church Dogmatics* 1.1, xiii: "...in this second draft I have excluded to the very best of my ability anything that might appear to find for theology a foundation, support, or justification in philosophical existentialism. 'The Word or existence?' The first edition gave to acumen, or perhaps stupidity, some ground for putting this question."

²² Wittgenstein is also associated with an anti-foundationalist stance in philosophy; c.f. D.Z. Phillips *Faith After Foundationalism*;

²³ In his Postscript to the 2003 SCM reissue of *The Peaceable Kingdom* in the UK, Hauerwas speaks of "the anti-foundationalism that certainly shapes *The Peaceable Kingdom* [originally published in 1983]"

²⁴ see discussion in Wells 1998, 42-61 in particular: "'Narrative from below' is chiefly concerned with expressing the character of the agent: by using narrative one can give a much more adequate description of the agent than is allowed for in most moral thinking. 'Narrative from above' is more concerned with prescription than description: it points towards how the agent's character can be formed and trained." (46); Wells notes that Hauerwas does not explicitly distinguish these two understandings of narrative. He also claims that "his work contains no programmatic essay that sets out his stall for the Christian narrative in the way that *A Story Formed Community* does for 'narrative from below'." (53) I am not sure Wells is right here, the 1986 essay *The Church As God's New Language* appears to do something akin to what he is asking for, witness the comments in the editorial introduction to this essay on page 142 of *The Hauerwas Reader* which may in fact be responding to Wells on this point? The paragraph which follows here is indebted to Wells' account of Hauerwas' move towards a non-foundational understanding of narrative.

²⁵ "A central thesis then begins to emerge: man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'.

.. there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of

transition Hauerwas makes from the time of *A Community of Character* in 1981, is the move away from a 'foundational' understanding of narrative in which human existence is 'naturally' storied (an understanding which would constitute a formal element of the kind of natural theology Hauerwas, along with Barth, strongly opposes) to a 'non-foundational' or 'anti-foundational' claim that:

'We are "storied people" because the God that sustains us is a "storied God" whom we come to know only by having our character formed appropriate to God's character. The formation of such character is not an isolated event but requires the existence of a corresponding society – a "storied society"'

Hauerwas' mature theology is dominated by 'strong' understandings of revelation and ecclesiology. These combine a Barthian emphasis on the primacy of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ with a Catholic stress on the Church's ability to tell God's story and a Radical Reformation perspective on the significance of 'the politics of Jesus'.

With the Grain: How we know God and the World

This distinctive theological mix is given its fullest elaboration to date in *With The Grain of The Universe*.²⁷ Here Hauerwas argues that Barth is "the great 'natural theologian' of the Gifford Lectures because he rightly understood that natural theology is impossible abstracted from a full doctrine of God"(9/10). If it is so divorced, it "cannot help but distort the character of God and accordingly of the world in which we find ourselves".(15) By a full doctrine of God, he means the "rationally compelling"(16) Christian confession of the Trinity(15), knowledge of which we call revelation (16): "The Trinity is not a further specification of a more determinative reality called god, because there is no more determinative reality than the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."(15)

stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things." MacIntyre, 1985, p216.

²⁶ Hauerwas 1981, 91

²⁷ "These lectures provided the invitation I needed to spell out the metaphysical side of my work". Hauerwas 2003, 183, n7

Knowledge of this reality comes through witness²⁸ (16) and Hauerwas argues that the theological argument he is developing entails a politics and an ethics; he means to show: that “the very idea that we might know God abstracted from how God makes himself known was the result of the loss of a Christian politics called church”; (16) that ethics and theology are inseparable(17); and that the truthfulness of theological claims entails the work they do for the shaping of holy lives.(17)

His title comes from a 1988 article by the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, where Yoder claims:

The point that apocalyptic makes... is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe. One does not come to that belief by reducing social processes to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one's battles for the control of one's own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb.(17)²⁹

Hauerwas believes any natural theology is mistaken “which fails to help us see that there can be no deeper reality-making claim than the one Yoder makes”, because “neither God nor the world can be truthfully known without the cross, which is why the knowledge of God and ecclesiology – or the politics called church – are interdependent”(17).

If we bracket his discussion of William James and Reinhold Niebuhr, we find in *With The Grain of the Universe* what amounts to a narrative of the fall and redemption of epistemology in the Western tradition. Hauerwas draws on the work of Milbank, Pickstock, Funkenstein and Taylor to outline the fall which he characterises as the epistemological or metaphysical overcoming of theology(36). His distinctive contribution to this narrative is to see it as correlative of “the temptation to cast theology as a truth separable from truthful witness.. available to anyone, without moral transformation and spiritual guidance”(36). The problem he highlights is a

²⁸ Hauerwas links his use of the language of witness to Barth

²⁹ John Howard Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology”. *Studies in Christian Ethics* I, no I (1988):58

conception of metaphysics which attempts “to secure the truth of Christian convictions in a manner which makes the content of those convictions secondary”(37). This leads on directly to Kant and an account of reality in terms of a public domain of nature and science within which religion (whose scope is reduced to the human and the ethical) can only take place “within the limits of reason alone”(38) i.e. the project of the Gifford Lectures. In this way, Hauerwas claims, theology abandoned the attempt to claim its own necessity for giving an account of the way things are and how we must live to know how they are. (38)

If the fall ultimately comes through Kant, redemption in Hauerwas’ narrative comes through Barth. This is displayed, at least partly, in the form of a biographical narrative with ‘the witness that was Karl Barth’ being made the “hero” of Hauerwas’ story (206). Hauerwas is committed to his format because it makes his hearers/readers take time to attend to the witness of particular lives: “we cannot separate Barth from his theology”.(170) Hauerwas insistence on telling the story is a way of displaying his methodological challenge to theology: “Modern philosophers and theologians generally do not think that stories can do the work of argument. Yet I agree with John Milbank that “narrating” exactly because narration is the “science” of the particular, is a more basic category than either explanation or understanding”.(206) More fundamentally, because of Hauerwas’ commitment to the language of “witness”, this represents a theological challenge to (social scientific) methodology.³⁰

That said, Hauerwas’ text in fact mixes biography with more conventional theological ‘explanation and understanding’. He highlights Barth’s refusal (seen in his 1937 Giffords) to separate theology and ethics. He labours to display what he believes is Barth’s extraordinary achievement in the *Church Dogmatics*, of “exemplifying how Christian language works”(142), “exploring the grammar of speech about God”(154), performing a theological overturning of epistemology

³⁰ c.f. WGU 146 Barth only sought to be a witness – not to “explain”.

(190) and a theological overcoming of metaphysics(189). Barth is “the pivotal figure” in Hauerwas’ narrative “because he was engaged in a massive attempt to overturn the epistemological prejudices of modernity” (190) from within ‘the strange new world of the bible’. While this initially led to a rejection of natural theology along with his rejection of Protestant liberalism,(158) Barth’s Christological reflections created the possibility of a more positive account of natural theology(163) in which “all things exist in Him”(162).³¹

In *With the Grain of The Universe*, the confession that the church tells the world’s story is explicated primarily in terms of the relation between dogmatics and natural theology or between theology and philosophy. Hauerwas is particularly concerned to refuse the Kantian positioning of theology within an allegedly more determinative account of rationality. He is insisting in the words of John Howard Yoder which he cites in both *After Christendom?* and *With the Grain of Universe* that:

The church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways. The meaning and validity, and limits, of concepts like ‘nature’ or a ‘science’ are not best seen when looked at alone but in the light of the confession of the lordship of Christ..³²

Sam Wells puts it even more sharply, in a way which helps to illustrate how Hauerwas bends philosophical categories into the service of theology, when he says that for Hauerwas, the church *is* his epistemology.³³ The church when it tells God’s story cannot accept that the form or content of this story can be determined by any larger story. This is why MacIntyre’s pluralisation of rationalities through his question “*Which Rationality?*” has been so useful to Hauerwas. The church cannot tell its story within terms set by a ‘godless’ rationality, but insists, in Bruce Marshall’s phrase, quoted in *With the Grain of the Universe* that beliefs must be ordered in such a way that that “Jesus Christ has unrestricted epistemic primacy”.³⁴

³¹ Barth quotation from *Dogmatics In Outline*, 26

³² from *The Priestly Kingdom*: Yoder 1988, 11 quoted on p37

³³ Wells 1998, 71

³⁴ quote from Marshall’s *Trinity and Truth* in WGU Hauerwas 2001, 210-11

In *With The Grain* Hauerwas takes issue with Barth's hostility to the idea of seeking specifically 'Christian' knowledges in history, science, morality or art, arguing that the church does have a stake in challenging false notions of these on theological grounds and "in producing knowledge that is congruent with the knowledge that is faith".³⁵

This is what Hauerwas has done 'specifically' in many of his essays and what is exemplified in *After Christendom?*'s chapters on freedom of religion, sex and education. What he displays notoriously well is his belief that the church as epistemology is also the church as *argument* – the church as a non-violent ongoing quarrel with a world which denies Christ's lordship over all things. As Hauerwas says, in Barth's theology "the language of the church is itself already an argument just to the extent that his descriptions and re-descriptions cannot help but challenge our normal way of seeing the world".³⁶

Education on Christian Terms

A prime example of this is the way in which the narrative priority of the church leads inevitably, for Hauerwas, to a reconsideration of historiography – to the concrete practices of narrating the world's story. In the 1999 preface to *After Christendom?* he argues that both modernity and postmodernity name social orders which presume God does not exist or even if God exists we must live as if God does not matter:

The challenge, quite simply, is how we as Christians can narrate such a world on our terms rather than the world's terms....Christian educational practices in modernity have not been able to produce knowledges that are "ours". So we tell the story of "the West" the way that story has been constructed by those whose purpose is to make the church and the God the church worships a minor or even negative character in the larger story of "freedom". Does this mean that I think the way Christians do "history" might differ from the way those who are not Christians do "history"? The answer is an emphatic "yes".³⁷

³⁵ WGU Hauerwas 2001, 203

³⁶ WGU Hauerwas 2001, 182

³⁷ AC Hauerwas 1999, 8; c.f. IGC Hauerwas 1995, 33: "Church, moreover, but names those practices through which the world is known and given a history." n4. "There is no world unless there is a church, nor can the

This emphatic verdict reinforces the position taken in the 1991 text of the book, particularly in his final chapter on education in liberal societies. There he takes up the language of Alasdair MacIntyre's Gifford Lectures, arguing that Christians need to provide a further narrative alternative to those offered by "encyclopedists and genealogists" – to those, that is, who offer an imperialistic liberal account of the world and those who challenge that account, by deconstructing its origins in terms of power and self-interest.³⁸ Against what he sees as the presumption of 'most Christians' in favour of the encyclopedists, on the grounds of resistance to relativism³⁹, Hauerwas' own perspective affirms much of the critique of the genealogists and acknowledges the influence of Foucault throughout *After Christendom?*⁴⁰. His challenge to liberal historiography therefore has affinities to the challenges coming from post-colonial scholars, citing the work of Edward Said in *After Christendom?*⁴¹ and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000) in *With the Grain of the Universe*⁴². Following Yoder, he argues that if Christian witness is to be faithful:

..how Christians tell their stories as well as how they tell the stories of others, cannot be based upon the presumptions that govern non-Christian historiography. Furthermore, only by writing history on their terms can Christians learn to locate the differences between the church and the world.⁴³

Hauerwas' attention to historiography reflects his commitment to the language of story and his sense of history as a meta-discipline, but as we saw above, his argument extends to all forms of knowledge. This makes him highly critical of the role of 'the school' and 'the university' within Western liberal societies, because

world have a history without the church. That is why the church knows the world better than the world can know itself." c.f. Pannenberg's comments on theological readings of history cited on pxxx below

³⁸ Hauerwas 1999, 147

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Hauerwas 1999, 164

⁴¹ Hauerwas 1999, 136

⁴² Hauerwas 2001, 234

⁴³ Hauerwas 2001, 234 where he cites Yoder's essay "Christ, the Hope of the World"

they are the paradigmatic institutional media⁴⁴ for a liberal, encyclopaedist and consequently imperial vision of the world, whose methods, even amid the new global civil war of rationalities, continue to be heavily policed by the assumptions of the Enlightenment.⁴⁵

Resistance to this requires not just the work of the genealogists or ‘post-colonialists’ in exposing the pretensions of the encyclopaedist project, it also calls for the church to bear witness to the alternative narrative of God’s story which challenges the unbridled relativism of the genealogists.⁴⁶ There is an inescapable imperialism about the church’s own mission which Hauerwas accepts. He does stand, he tells us in *After Christendom?* with those who want Christianity to “take over” the world.⁴⁷ The key challenge and the note on which *After Christendom?* ends, is how to be witnesses, educators and gospel communicators without explicitly or implicitly underwriting patterns of domination and violence antithetical to the Kingdom brought by Christ.⁴⁸ Christians must bear witness, “not because we lack respect for those different from us”, but, in the words of Lesslie Newbigin which end the book, as those “entrusted with the story” and called “as part of a Christian congregation to tell and embody the truth of the story”, who know that the work of persuading the other is “in God’s hands”.^{49 50}

⁴⁴ Hauerwas 1999, 135

⁴⁵ Hauerwas 2001, 239

⁴⁶ Hauerwas 1999, n21, 188

⁴⁷ p7 in the 1999 preface to AC

⁴⁸ Hauerwas 1999, 152

⁴⁹ The final Newbigin quote comes from *The Gospel In A Pluralist Society*, p182. This book was based on the Alexander Robertson lecture series delivered in Glasgow in Autumn 1998.

⁵⁰ Newbigin’s words end his text and likely ended the lecture series, but Hauerwas has also added an appendix in the form of a letter from a graduate student, David Toole, commenting on chapter six. While he approves of Hauerwas’s careful thinking about Christian complicity in genocide, he is concerned that Hauerwas seems to be presenting Christians as also “victims of imperialism, standing as another tribe alongside the Sioux”.(157) Toole questions whether Hauerwas use of the Newbigin quotes simply reproduces a violent Christian imperialism.(158) He asks whether non-violence demands a certain silencing of the Christian proclamation, where insistence on its truthfulness continues to label and exclude those who have been subjected to genocidal violence and continue to be excluded by society.(159) Toole questions the cost of MacIntyre’s narrative quest for an intelligible life.(160) If Hauerwas wants the killing to stop, must he not go beyond the judgment of others which he holds on to in his lecture?(161) The letter, says Hauerwas, is “a reminder that the way of non-violence is never easy and that our language can embody that violence in ways that we hardly knew”.(153)

For Hauerwas, Christians in modernity have been too willing to ‘make peace with the world’⁵¹

Christians’ attitudes towards modernity have primarily been characterised by a sense of inferiority. As John Milbank observes, ‘The pathos of modern theology is its false humility’. Our preaching and theology has been one ceaseless effort to conform to the canons of intelligibility produced by the economic and intellectual formations characteristic of modern and, in particular, liberal societies. Christians in modernity thought their task was to make the Gospel intelligible to the world rather than to help the world to understand why it could not be intelligible without the Gospel.”⁵²

Summary

Here then, is the first of the three main challenges Hauerwas brings to Scottish practical theology – the claim that the church has a narrative priority over the world. The story it tells is God’s story, but God’s story cannot be adequately known apart from the contingent witness of the church which tells it and lives by it. This, although, Hauerwas rarely uses the term, is the Christian gospel understood as metanarrative – the story which positions and renders intelligible all other stories. Since it is the ‘largest’ and most determinative of stories, it should be understood as that which makes an interpretation of reality properly ‘public’. Hauerwas is clearly in sympathy with Lesslie Newbigin’s claim that the gospel is ‘public truth’⁵³, but he also wants to call in question the metaphysics and the epistemologies which seek to categorise truth as public or private. The point is not to insist that the gospel conforms to such “canons of intelligibility” but to demonstrate that the gospel is itself a “canon of intelligibility” for the world. We learn to know the world in church and as church. Without the church the world does not know itself. The church tells the world’s story. It ‘is’ an epistemology.

Hauerwas believes that this claim and confession must be made forcefully because it is forcefully and imperiously dismissed by modern liberalism. Once it has been

⁵¹ WGU 208, n4; c.f. Hauerwas 1999, 88 “we have not faced the deep tension that must always be characteristic of church and world”

⁵² the inset quote comes from Milbank, p265 in Ward ed. 1997; whole quote from STT/Hauerwas 1998 193

⁵³ see Newbigin 1989, 222 “The Church has to claim the high ground of public truth.” and Hauerwas citations from Newbigin in AC Ch 6, pp143ff.

heard, it must be clearly understood that it is not, in any sense, a claim that the church knows all truth or that only the church knows any truth.⁵⁴ The church's belief in creation and providence, the church's confession of the Lordship of Christ over all the world, the church's confession of its own sinfulness, (Hauerwas recognises that "the world in us refuses to affirm that this is God's world"⁵⁵) these mean that the church expects to listen as well as proclaim, to discover as well as to reveal, to receive as well as give in its relationship with the world. The crux of the matter is to do with narrative priority - with the refusal to accept that any story which rejects the Lordship of Christ can be ultimately determinative for Christians and with the realisation that this involves an argument with traditions of rationality which have been constructed within such a story and with the methodologies and genres shaped by these traditions.⁵⁶

2. The Church Does Not Have But Is a Social Ethic

The second Enlightenment question to be given an ecclesial answer is that of how we should live. The first extended formulation of this claim in Hauerwas' work can be found in his 1983 book, *The Peaceable Kingdom*,⁵⁷ where he argues that "the nature and form of the church is the center of any attempt to develop Christian ethics"⁵⁸ and that "the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic".⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Hauerwas explicitly refutes Stout on this point in PTF Hauerwas 2004, 224 n16

⁵⁵ Hauerwas 2003, 101

⁵⁶ The first sentence of *After Christendom?* raises the problem of its genre by comparing it to Alasdair MacIntyre's formulation of the genre contradiction of his 1990 Gifford Lectures. Arguing against Enlightenment presuppositions in a genre captive to those presuppositions is "to deliver what one has to say over to a form well designed to prevent one saying it or to prevent one being heard saying it". MacIntyre 1990, 200 quoted in Hauerwas 1999, 13; see also the closing pages of WGU pp238-240 where Hauerwas returns to MacIntyre's critique of the university

⁵⁷ Hauerwas 2003, Ch 6; the phrase itself first occurs in TT Hauerwas 1977, 142

⁵⁸ Hauerwas 2003, 95

⁵⁹ Hauerwas 2003, 99; Duncan Forrester calls this "one of Stanley Hauerwas' most suggestive and problematic epigrams" – "it is a very attractive notion, suggesting that Christian ethics must be embodied in the life of a community, that ethics is not a possession of the Church but the gift to the Church which constitutes it as Church." Nation & Wells ed. 195 and 205

What then is at stake for Hauerwas in this language of ‘having’ or ‘being’ a social ethic?

As with the previous confession, the key to understanding Hauerwas’ position here is his belief that the modern, post-Kantian conception of ethics has already, by definition, foreclosed the possibility of bearing witness to the gospel in key respects. Once it is clear that a reflective tradition has evolved to this point, the ethical witness the church is called to bear is seen to be incommensurable with the available language of that tradition. This calls for a rhetorical move⁶⁰ which will display that incommensurability by refusing to allow the tradition to ‘position’ and so limit and distort the church’s witness. Hence the ‘strange new’ claim that the church *is* a social ethic.

In *The Peaceable Kingdom*, the first of his books since the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, having claimed with MacIntyre that “there is no ethics without a qualifier” i.e. that there is no untraditioned ethics – Hauerwas argues that this apparently ‘methodological’ claim should be seen as “a strong substantive assumption about the status and necessity of the church as the locus for Christian ethical reflection”.⁶¹ The substance of Christian ethics comes from the church and it is first addressed to the church. It is not “written for everyone” but for people formed by the story of Israel and Jesus. It begins and ends with a story, which depends on a historic people for its telling and transmission.⁶²

In language which echoes that of the 1937 Oxford Conference⁶³, Hauerwas claims in his 1983 work, that “the first social ethical task of the church is to be the

⁶⁰ c.f. Joseph Mangina’s comment that “This dictum is no foundational axiom for an ecclesiological theory. It functions, rather, as a kind of grammatical remark, designed to undermine the modern assumption that the church’s moral life is somehow accidental to its existence.” Mangina 1999, 284

⁶¹ Hauerwas 2003, 97; c.f. also Michael Walzer’s refutation of ‘a moral Esperanto’: “Morality is thick from the beginning, culturally integrated, fully resonant” from *Thick and Thin, Moral Argument as Home and Abroad*, Notre Dame Press 1994 quoted by Mark Nation in Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 101

⁶² Hauerwas 2003, 97

⁶³ Visser ‘t Hooft and Oldham 1937

church”⁶⁴. Its priority must be telling the stories of Israel and Jesus, in response to which it sets its own agenda of peace and justice. By being the church, it shows the world that it is the world – ‘world’ here understood, in Yoder’s (Barthian) phrase, as “all of that in creation that has taken the freedom not yet to believe”.⁶⁵

The liberalism of the European Enlightenment is the prime manifestation of creation ‘taking the freedom not to believe’, which Hauerwas seeks to engage in his writings. He sees an ethical as well as an epistemological fall here – away from Aquinas’ appropriation of Aristotelian ethics within an overarching theological narrative to the Kantian subordination of theology to ethics in the context of a liberalism which elevated loyalty to the nation-state above loyalty to any particular religious tradition. In liberal theory, the state was both allowed a national particularity and expected to express neutral reason and ethical universalism. The result was a theology subordinated to an ethics subordinated to the national interest which required the privatisation of Christian practice.⁶⁶ Hauerwas presses the irony of the Enlightenment claim to save the world from the pathological effects of religious wars by means of Reason⁶⁷ – with the result that people then killed in the name of the State, whose borders liberal thinkers have always found deeply problematic to justify.⁶⁸

He emphasises the degree to which ethics in liberal societies is constrained by the economic and military disciplines of the nation-state. To the extent that Christianity became culturally established in such societies it increasingly acceded to such disciplines and the churches accepted a mode of “responsible” engagement with and service to the state which Hauerwas argues led to a functionally atheistic

⁶⁴ Hauerwas 2003, 100

⁶⁵ Hauerwas 2003, 101; c.f. Hauerwas 1995, 21: “the first task of the church is not to make the world just, but to make the world the world.”

⁶⁶ Hauerwas 1999, 29-31

⁶⁷ Hauerwas 1999, 29

⁶⁸ Hauerwas 1999, 33

Christian social ethics.⁶⁹ The prime recent example of this and Hauerwas' *bête noire* is American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, 'the preacher whose church was called America'.⁷⁰ For Hauerwas, Niebuhr's emphasis on responsibility and the calculus of power led to an ethics stripped of Christian distinctiveness which was ultimately a disguised humanism with no real place for the church.⁷¹

The redemption of ethics in Hauerwas' reading, is again associated with the figure of Karl Barth and his resistance to the rise of Nazism. Barth was particularly able to offer an ethical resistance to fascism because he had already refused the modern subordination of dogmatics to ethics and insisted that dogmatics and ethics were inseparable.

This vision of the church as a confessing community whose confession of Jesus Christ as Lord requires and enables it to resist the idolatrous disciplines of the state is a key feature of Hauerwas' understanding of the church as a social ethic.

Hauerwas' belief that the language of ethics in modernity rules out crucial dimensions of Christian witness, leads him to follow Barth in resorting to an unsubstitutable theological vocabulary. There is no available 'public' language for the church to *have*, without it denying what it is called to *be*. Hauerwas therefore operates what might be called a strategy of 'rhetorical replacement', in which theological, very often ecclesial, language is inserted in formulations where the philosophical language of modernity is typically used. Arne Rasmusson goes to the heart of this when he says "to put it starkly, Yoder and Hauerwas place "church" where most academics place "theory", "epistemology" or "hermeneutics".⁷²

⁶⁹ Hauerwas 1999, 31

⁷⁰ Hauerwas 2001, 92

⁷¹ Hauerwas 2001, 136, 131; this verdict on Niebuhr echoes that of Robert Song in his 1997 *Christianity and Liberal Society*.

⁷² Rasmusson 2000, 186; c.f. IGC Hauerwas 1995, 157: "That Christians must be gathered to worship in itself is a "morality"."

This is a major reason why Hauerwas' work is a *skandalon* to many and why it has attracted so much attention. However, it should not be seen as superficial attention seeking. The sharpness and daring of Hauerwas' rhetorical formulations direct the readers' attentions where he wishes them to go, towards proposals which are substantially different from those expressed in the language he is departing from. What he describes more clearly than before in *With The Grain of the Universe* is the way in which Barth is his primary model here. Barth responds to a linguistic and philosophical impasse by reasserting a distinctive mode of theological language, in the full knowledge that it will grate on modern ears and will be considered fideist and regressive. Hauerwas sees his own work in almost identical terms.⁷³

The question of what it means to be ethical, therefore has to take second place to the question of what it means to be the Church. It is impossible that it should precede it. The church is, in the second part of Yoder's formulation which Hauerwas repeatedly returns to, *axiologically prior to the world* and "the Lordship of Christ is the centre which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus".⁷⁴

What we find in Hauerwas' work is that the two languages – of 'theology' and 'ethics' are run on parallel tracks – the striking rhetorical effects of this most often binary opposition display the argument that they cannot be collapsed into one another. However, they have to be kept within sight of one another, otherwise he fears that the misformed instincts and intelligences of Christians in liberal societies will fail to understand that they are being summoned to a double *metanoia* about both languages.

⁷³ see pp5-6 of the 1999 preface to *After Christendom?* where Hauerwas claims "we must learn again how to speak as Christians" because "too often we have lost the oddness of Christian speech.. we assume we are adequate speakers because such language is so familiar.. take for example the word *church*..."

⁷⁴ from *The Priestly Kingdom*: Yoder 1988, 11 quoted in AC37 and WGU 220; c.f. IGC (1995) p22: My claim "that the church does not have a social ethic, but rather is a social ethic, cannot help but sound, in some contexts, like a call for group narcissism. Yet I make such a claim in the hope of reminding Christians in America that we too are an imperialistic polity that must challenge the imperialistic pretensions of that entity called "USA"

This means that when Hauerwas argues that ethics is nothing other and nothing more than discipleship, embodied holiness, or Christian formation,⁷⁵ the word ethics needs to keep on figuring in his argument and to keep on being subjected to an ongoing theological deconstruction. The burden of Hauerwas' rhetoric is constantly *use this language instead of that, because in so doing you will see the limitations of that language and the capacities of this language.*

Christians learn to be 'ethical' then, through the practices of the church. They are taught what it means to be forgiven and through that learn what it means to be sinners. They are taught what it means to love one another and through that learn how to be married. They are taught in baptism what it means to receive their lives as a gift and through that learn how to be creatures. They are taught at the Lord's Supper that they are one body and through that learn how to be a society. For Hauerwas, apart from these practices, Christian ethics is simply not intelligible.⁷⁶

It is these practices or disciplines which enable the church to be a community of resistance to liberal capitalist orders. Writing in 1995, Hauerwas rejected the label communitarian, arguing that community is "too weak a word for the church":

I seek therefore, not for the church to be a community, but rather to be a body constituted by disciplines that create the capacity to resist the disciplines of the body associated with the modern nation-state and in particular, the economic habits that support that state. For the church to be a social ethic, rather than to have a social ethic, means the church must be (is) a body polity. The crucial question is how the church can be such without resorting to mirroring the nation-state and/or being tempted to use the nation-state for the disciplining it so desires and needs. The latter temptation is almost irresistible in modernity once the church has been forced to become a "voluntary association".⁷⁷

⁷⁵ c.f. Rasmusson 2000 184ff -

⁷⁶ These illustrations are drawn from chs 4 and 5 of *After Christendom?* Hauerwas 1999, pp93-111, 127

⁷⁷ Hauerwas 1995, 26

Summary

Hauerwas' second challenge to practical theology asserts the ethical or axiological priority of the church. The language of ethics in modernity must be supplanted by the church's own language for charting how we should live – the language of discipleship and holiness.⁷⁸

As with the first challenge, Alasdair MacIntyre's assertion of a plurality of ethic-s and his question "Whose Justice?" points to the need for decision between alternatives. This way of mapping the ethical, as appropriated by Hauerwas, refuses the idea that there is a single 'public' domain of the 'ethical' which exists prior to and independent of the life of the church.

The primary place in which God calls us to learn how we should live is in church. The story the church tells and the practices of the church constitute our deepest 'ethical' formation. As we learn "what is going on"⁷⁹ and "what sort of community we should be"⁸⁰ we are prepared and equipped to decide how we should live.

3. The Church Is An Alternative Politics

The third key theme in Hauerwas' work is his radical challenge to the major modern liberal proposal for how we should organise ourselves politically. In his work we find the theological opposition between church and 'world' understood as requiring a revisionist account of the relationship between church and state in western liberal societies.

⁷⁸ Nigel Biggar compares Hauerwas' approach to Karl Barth's belief that "theological ethics must 'annex' general ethics, rather than surrender to it"; in *Nation & Wells*, 2000, 147

⁷⁹ H Richard Niebuhr's question, quoted in *Hauerwas Reader* 634, 653

⁸⁰ this is Arne Rasmusson's summary of Hauerwas' position in Rasmusson 2000, 185

His dissatisfaction with the place given to 'ethics' within liberal modernity is matched by his critique of 'politics' in this era. Again the challenge is conceived and offered on a large scale and involves a deliberate intrusion of ecclesial language into political theory in striking and unsettling ways.

Hauerwas' critique of liberal politics has been decisively shaped by the work of John Howard Yoder on *The Politics of Jesus*⁸¹. He is convinced "that when Christians look back on this [20th] century of theology in America, *The Politics of Jesus* will be seen as a new beginning"⁸². In *With The Grain of the Universe* he can write that "Yoder forces us to see that the doctrines of God and non-violence are constitutive of one another" and "Christian non-resistance has its basis in the character of God as revealed by Christ".⁸³

Hauerwas therefore sees the commitment to non-violence as constitutive of 'politics' and what makes 'politics' as opposed to violence and coercion necessary. He also argues that "inherent in Christian convictions is a substantive account of the good"⁸⁴ to which politics must be orientated. These two interrelated factors make the tension between Christianity and the state irresolvable in principle.⁸⁵ In *After Christendom?* Hauerwas draws on readings of Augustine by Rowan Williams and John Milbank, to argue that only the church can be truly public⁸⁶, and only the church can have a true politics, because only the church as a community is oriented in love towards the true *telos* of all things, which is the Trinity.⁸⁷

⁸¹ The title of Yoder's best known book, first published in 1972

⁸² quote on cover of the 2nd edition of *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder 1994

⁸³ both quotations from Hauerwas 2001, 220

⁸⁴ Hauerwas 1995, 208

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ see the discussion in AC pp...., in particular Hauerwas' citation of Rowan Williams' reading of *The City of God* and Williams' argument that Augustine is concerned about a "*redefinition* of the public itself, designed to show that it is life outside the Christian community which fails to be truly public, authentically political. The opposition is not between public and private, church and world, but between political virtue and political vice." the quotation on p40 comes from Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*", *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987), 58

⁸⁷ AC 27

Hauerwas therefore offers us an alternative narrative of what it means to be political, which cannot help but be marginal to liberal societies and to the mainstream theology which seeks to act ‘responsibly’ within such societies. It is important to note that he does not abandon the language of politics, but aims at a radical Christological revision of it. Within the terms of this revision, as with his alternative account of the ethical, the language of ecclesiology is made central.⁸⁸ Theology entails a politics and the primary and exemplary form of that politics is the church, which is “not simply a ‘voluntary association’ that may be of some use to the wider polity, but rather is that community constituted by practices by which all other politics are to be judged.”⁸⁹ We would therefore be justified in characterizing Hauerwas’ position by adding to Yoder’s formulation the claim that ‘the church is politically prior to the world’.

Hauerwas believes that within the politics of liberalism, the church will only ever be allowed to be part of the “private” realm.⁹⁰ Since he believes this role or realm cannot accommodate the church’s mission, he seeks to challenge that definition of politics root and branch. His challenge is couched in ecclesial terms: the church *is* an alternative politics. Its understanding of authority and governance derives from its confession of the Kingship of Christ⁹¹. The church already rules with Christ, but the manner of its rule as well as its reality is Christologically derived, so it rules non-violently.

Hauerwas therefore offers us a kind of ‘political theology’ but not as we know it. It is a strange hybrid of Catholic and Radical Reformation political theologies. In recognition of this, Arne Rasmusson’s 1995 study of Moltmann and Hauerwas, *The Church As Polis*⁹², associates Hauerwas with “theological politics” rather than

⁸⁸ AC Hauerwas 1999, 5: “I tried and continue to try to force myself as well as my readers to rethink what they normally mean by “politics” as well as what we mean by “theology”.

⁸⁹ AC Hauerwas 1999, 6

⁹⁰ AC Hauerwas 1999, 7

⁹¹ IGC Hauerwas 1995, 214-6

⁹² Rasmusson 1995

“political theology”⁹³ a characterization of his position which Hauerwas has since taken up himself.⁹⁴

Hauerwas’ repeated stress on the church as ‘a politics’⁹⁵, reflects his sense that his advocacy of this ‘anabaptist’ theme is resisted by many within the theological community, both Protestant and Catholic. In an essay reflecting on “Why Resident Aliens Struck a Chord”, Hauerwas locates one area of particular resistance:

The people who seem to like it least are UCC ministers ... and Presbyterians..
..Presbyterians also talk a lot about the necessity of having a theology of creation that they assume can be abstracted from redemption. By creation they mean that there has to be an independent criteria about nature, separate from Christology. They so want to be Niebuhrian transformers of culture that they end up praising “creation” in a way to imply that it does not need redemption.⁹⁶

Rasmusson notes that the Radical Reformation theology which has shaped Hauerwas’ theological politics:

... gives primacy not to politics understood as the struggle for control over the processes of social change (the politics of the world), but to the politics of the church as an alternative *polis*.⁹⁷

This is not because Hauerwas thinks processes of social change are unimportant, but because he believes God is concerned to redeem those processes. Their redemption in Christ is disclosed to the world by the witness of the church. The church’s first responsibility is to be a politics which can offer that witness. Unless it

⁹³ In Rasmusson’s narrative, “political theology emerged as an attempt to mediate Christianity to modernity”(14), it represented “a positive Christian reception of modernity”(89) and is shaped by “a positive reception of secularization read as humanity becoming subject of its own history”(165). He argues that “Political theology is better described as a Postmaterialist transformation of Christian theology. It has its main support in the Postmaterialist upper middle class strata and promotes the same values and policies. It can be seen as an apologetic attempt to mediate Christian faith to these strata, which dominate the cultural sphere.”(167)

⁹⁴ AC 5

⁹⁵ This is the organizing rubric of *After Christendom?* in 1991 while the sub-title of *In Good Company* (1995) is *The Church as Polis*; Max Stackhouse explicitly disputes this arguing that the church is not a ‘polis’: Max L. Stackhouse, “In the Company of Hauerwas,” *Journal for Christian Theological Research* [http://apu.edu/~CTRF/articles/1997_articles/stackhouse.html] 2:1 (1997)

⁹⁶ IGC 60; this corresponds to Hauerwas’ discussion in WGU of the role of justification in Niebuhr’s theology, see p95 for Niebuhr’s accusation and p136: Hauerwas argues that in Niebuhr’s ethics “Justification of faith is loosed from its Christological context and made a truth to underwrite a generalized virtue of humility in order to make Christians trusted players in the liberal game of tolerance.”

⁹⁷ Rasmusson 1995, 17

does this, it cannot serve the world. It is only as this that it can be a witness to the state and can serve the state.

This is the point Stephen Long makes when he argues that Hauerwas is *against the nations*⁹⁸ precisely because he is *for the nations*:

If the church does not insist on its own primacy as a social structure, liberalism will not concede it. Its imperial demands seek to incorporate all social formations within its own architectonic grasp. Liberalism will close down any “complex space” that exists outside of the “simple space” liberalism creates.⁹⁹

The further MacIntyre type question implied in Hauerwas’ work is the question of *What Politics?*. Liberalism, for Hauerwas, names ‘the politics’ entailed by a way of narrating the world which replaces the universality of God’s reign in Christ with a false universal narrative linking ‘freedom’ to ‘rationality’ and to the social conditions of market capitalism:

.. the project of modernity was to produce people who believe they should have no story except the story they chose when they had no story. Such a story is called the story of freedom and is assumed to be irreversibly institutionalized economically as market capitalism and politically as democracy. That story and the institutions that embody it, is the enemy we must attack through Christian preaching.¹⁰⁰

Why does Hauerwas believe liberalism and its institutions should be ‘attacked’? The primary reason is because they embody and display a false and atheistic story about ‘how things are’. In its modern form, this false story has been justified in terms of the alleged failure of the church to provide an adequate narrative basis for politics, for the organization of human societies. In the liberal story, the state ‘overcomes’ the church by out-narrating the church’s story, when, in response to the so-called “wars of religion”, it claims to offer a way to peace through the

⁹⁸ The title of Hauerwas 1985 Book – subtitled *War and Survival in Liberal Societies*

⁹⁹ Long 2001, 102

¹⁰⁰ p198 in *No Enemy, No Christianity*” in STT (1998)

deployment of a less particular and ‘more determinative’ account of what human beings share in common.¹⁰¹

For Hauerwas, this account is put in crisis by the ironic consequence that the citizens of liberal democracies “no longer kill one another in the name of God but in the names of nation-states”¹⁰². Liberal political theory, based in universalist notions of human rights and voluntarist understandings of social contract, has particular problems in accounting for borders, in positing land and territory as organizing principles – in giving, therefore, an adequate account of the nation-state.¹⁰³ Hauerwas cites Yoder’s awareness that the kind of “neo-Constantinianism” that emerged after the so-called “wars of religion” in 1648 was “in many ways far more pernicious” than mediaeval identifications of church and society, because from Westphalia onwards, “the church was linked to particular national governments that weakened the ability of the church to criticize such identifications in the name of the unity to be found in the Holy Roman Church. After the Reformation, churches... justify themselves by serving a particular society”.¹⁰⁴ Hauerwas believes that Christians should stop trying to “rescue the liberal project in either its epistemological or political form” and should stop conceiving of their role as making such arrangements work, because the political irrelevance of the church is built into the logic of liberal politics.

To argue this, is of course to abandon the Niebuhrian insistence on ‘responsibility’ in the interest, Hauerwas claims, of recovering a deeper responsibility to God and our neighbours: our calling to display the indispensable role of the church in the politics of salvation. The church therefore, in this way of reasoning, is called to a ‘negative’ witness to the state – to be the holy nation which is ‘against the nations’.

¹⁰¹ WGU 31; here Hauerwas echoes the analysis of William T. Cavanaugh in Milbank, Pickstock & Ward. ed 1999.

¹⁰² AC 33

¹⁰³ AC 33-34

¹⁰⁴ see n33 221 in WGU quoting Yoder’s essay “Christ, the Hope of the World” from *The Royal Priesthood*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994

This is the witness displayed *in extremis* by Karl Barth and those who stood behind the Barmen declaration, but it is also the broader witness Barth made and all Christians should make against the autonomous claims of modernity.¹⁰⁵ In *With The Grain of the Universe*, despite his important dialogues with O'Donovan in the late 1990s in response to *The Desire of the Nations*¹⁰⁶, Hauerwas is still unwilling to offer an alternative positive account of the state in terms of political theory or political theology. He believes the priority for the church is to witness in such a way that the world understands itself as world. This remains the most significant political service the church can render the state – to put its autonomous and idolatrous claims into crisis, to help it understand its own unintelligibility.¹⁰⁷

Summary

In the modern era, liberal political theory endorsed the nation-state as the sovereign political body, constructed criteria of publicity, based on a transcendental singular understanding of rationality and defined politics in terms of procedural power struggles within a voluntaristic state/social contract.

Hauerwas challenges each of these notions: the role offered to the state, which underwrites violence; the criterion for publicity which privatises theology and the definition of politics, which fails to be ordered to a substantive notion of the good. In opposition to all secular political theory and most political theology, he articulates a theological politics in which the church as a body politic¹⁰⁸ is given a primary and exemplary role. Salvation itself is political, because there is no salvation outside of the church.¹⁰⁹ Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the rituals of the church's

¹⁰⁵ WGU 203, n67

¹⁰⁶ O'Donovan 1996; see Hauerwas' response (written with James Fodor) in the special volume of *Studies in Christian Ethics* devoted to O'Donovan's book: 11.2 T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998.

¹⁰⁷ This does for Hauerwas, have something in common with what Rorty, Fish and 'the genealogists' are doing in critiquing 'the liberal justification of liberal societies'.

¹⁰⁸ IGC Hauerwas 1995, 26: Hauerwas owes this formulation to Yoder's *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Church Before A Watching World*, Yoder 1992

¹⁰⁹ AC Hauerwas 1999, Ch 1

politics;¹¹⁰ prayer its most important civic responsibility¹¹¹, preaching its primary discourse and worship its main political task.¹¹² Peace and non-violence are its origin through creation and redemption and its eschatological destiny in Christ.

Having considered these three ecclesial confessions as exemplifying Hauerwas' challenges to liberal accounts of epistemology, ethics and politics, the rest of this chapter will focus on two approaches to evaluating the value of his work:

- Hauerwas in scholarship: a survey of the key criticisms made of Hauerwas' work and his responses to them, leading to a critical assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of his approach.
- Hauerwas in Scotland: does Hauerwas' critique travel? How appropriate is he as an interlocutor for Scottish practical and 'public' theology. Is Scotland post 1939 a liberal social order of the kind he opposes?

Hauerwas in Current Scholarship

Discussion and criticism of Hauerwas is now legion. Here I map the major lines of criticism with a particular interest in reception of his work in the UK. James Gustafson's in/famous essay on "The Sectarian Temptation" appeared in 1985, arguing that Hauerwas was engaged in a retreat from responsible Christian concern for society into an idealised ecclesial location, where purity came at the expense of irrelevance.¹¹³ A decade later Hauerwas was the subject of fiercely critical

¹¹⁰ PK Hauerwas 1984, 99; also IGC p6 "Politics is certainly about the conversation necessary for a people across time to discover goods that they have in common, but what is needed is the actual display of the material practices that constitute that conversation. I have tried to do that by calling attention to practices so common to Christians that we hardly notice their significance.; IGC Hauerwas 1995, 63: "our lives are only genuinely social to the extent that they have been transformed through baptism into the body of Christ."

¹¹¹ CET Hauerwas 1988, 185

¹¹² RA Hauerwas 1989, 45

¹¹³ The honour of having provoked or at least focused this best known and most widely repeated criticism of Hauerwas, belongs to a Scottish theologian, Duncan Forrester, whose appreciative remarks about Hauerwas at a meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics, made to the North American theologian James Gustafson (who had been Hauerwas' doctoral advisor at Yale), led Gustafson in 1985 to write his highly critical paper *The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, Church and University*. See Gustafson 1995

condemnation from Gloria Albrecht in her 1995 book, *The Character of Our Communities*.¹¹⁴ Albrecht accused Hauerwas of a failure to address the significance of his own social and political location as a white male Texan. She also charged that his reluctance to endorse work for justice was symptomatic of “white middle-class cynicism and despair” and legitimated “pessimism and paralysis”. Ultimately, she suggested that in his failure to attend to questions of economics, gender and ethnicity, he reproduced a pattern of patriarchal violence in his work.¹¹⁵ Sam Wells 1998 volume on Hauerwas summarised the main lines of criticism directed at his work up to that point as positing variously that Hauerwas: is sectarian¹¹⁶; that he is a fideist; that he holds a relativist understanding of truth¹¹⁷; that he holds an authoritarian understanding of orthodoxy¹¹⁸, that he lacks an adequate theology of creation¹¹⁹; that his theology pays insufficient attention to the Holy Spirit¹²⁰; that he

¹¹⁴ Albrecht 1995; for Hauerwas’ response see SJT

¹¹⁵ Albrecht 1995, 115-117; this was still her position in 2002 “violence is intrinsic to his proposal” Albrecht “Unmasking the Differences – Violence and Social Control” in *Cross Currents* Spring 2002, although here she locates the main problem with Augustine and Hauerwas’ problem as his agreement with Augustine, which is driven by and serves his privileged social location..

¹¹⁶ The sectarian charge, while originating in Troeltsch’s typology of church and sect, is also related to H.R. Niebuhr’s typology of responses to culture, with Hauerwas assigned along with Yoder and the Radical Reformation tradition to the “Christ against culture” position. Those who have followed Gustafson in this kind of criticism include Max Stackhouse in a review of *In Good Company* in *Christian Century*, 18 Oct 1995; Hauerwas has moved from being irritated to simply exasperated by this criticism, which he regards as a lazy shorthand. It is a charge he flatly rejects [IGC Hauerwas 1995, 58: “we reject the claim that thereby we are leading a retreat from social engagement and political significance, or that in fact we are “sectarians”] arguing that on the one hand it reflects the tendency of the nation-state to subsume all other social identities into its own [IGC Hauerwas 1995, 59: “Who taught us that it is a mistake to be tribal? ... “Tribal” became a dirty word when we realized that it kept some people from submerging themselves and their families into the nation.”] and that it fails to appreciate the “gathered” nature of all churches. [IGC Hauerwas 1995, 157: “Our account of the gathered church, I argue, renders problematic Troeltsch’s well known characterization of church, sect, and mystical types as well as H. Richard Niebuhr’s 5 types of relation. Such typologies not only derive their intelligibility from quite doubtful epistemological assumptions, but more troubling, their very heuristic power tempts us to forget that even the “church type” is gathered.”] His defenders against this charge include Banner 1999, 32 and the whole of pp27-39] and Werpehowski [Werpehowski 2002, 72 “the criticisms are unhelpful and improper”.] Nigel Biggar also defends him in his essay “*Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?*” arguing that Hauerwas “is interested in having the Church shape society-at-large” [in *Nation & Wells* ed. 2000, pp141ff quotation from p144]

¹¹⁷ Hauerwas’ anti-foundationalism also leads to charges of relativism. Wells 1998, 77 Hauerwas addresses these directly in his discussion of Yoder’s witness at the end of *With The Grain of the Universe*, where he both partially refuses to translate “our language” into such a category and partially endorses the tactical value to Christians of “pluralist/relativist questioning of secular orthodoxies”. However, his final word in this passage is that “Christians must challenge every attempt to make relativism a new monism” and must affirm the supremacy and lordship of Christ. WGU Hauerwas 2001, pp222-225

¹¹⁸ Hauerwas frequent references to ‘the story’ have been criticised for imposing a false unity upon the diversity of the bible and Christian tradition. [Wells 1998, 130-1; referencing Julian Hartt 1984 and Gloria Albrecht 1995.]

¹¹⁹ Wells noted in 1998, that this criticism was often linked to the charge of sectarianism. Michael Banner has criticised what he calls Hauerwas’ “blanket suspicion of appeals to creation” [Banner 1999, 19] arguing that

does not do justice to the relationship between the centrality of the Church and the finality of Christ.¹²¹ This last was echoed by Scottish Reformed theologian David Fergusson, whose 1998 *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* was more critical than appreciative in its treatment of Hauerwas, expressing discontent with the relation between Christology and ecclesiology in his work¹²² and with his idealisation of the church.¹²³ Wells' own principal criticism was that Hauerwas had failed to fully articulate his eschatology.¹²⁴ Michael Banner's more appreciative 1999

here Hauerwas is "insufficiently dogmatic" and that he should move to offer a corrected account of the theologies of creation which he rejects. [Banner 1999, 17] William Werpehowski also criticises Hauerwas for an inadequate account of creation, which he suggests narrows the relationship between God's activity and the world in Hauerwas' ethics. [Werpehowski 2002, 29]

¹²⁰ Wells suggests that Hauerwas needs to develop his doctrine of the Holy Spirit more fully in order to address the tension between redemption as *remembered* and redemption as *performed*. A fuller doctrine of the Spirit would also help Hauerwas to give a "desperately needed" account of how God works outside of the Church (c.f. Fergusson 1998, 67 and n122 below). Wells, 1998, 97-8

¹²¹ Wells 1998, 130: this is "a constructive criticism that does justice to his whole theology".

¹²² Fergusson 1998: 67.. "the principal weakness in Hauerwas' theology is its overdetermination of the distinctiveness of the church. This is reflected both in an attenuated reading of the person and work of Christ, and in a reluctance to describe the possibility of ethical perception and action outwith the Christian community." and p72 "in Hauerwas there is a slide from Christology into ecclesiology." Fergusson's charge that the church in Hauerwas' theology comes to occupy the place which should be occupied by Christ was anticipated in a 1995 essay in which Hauerwas describes how he structures his teaching on Christian ethics: "The emphasis on the relation between church and world is a correlative of the strong eschatological theme running through the course. I argue that the attempt to display Christian ethics in terms of nature/grace or creation/redemption often results in a failure to appreciate the eschatological character of Christian convictions. For example it is interesting to note that ethics based [on] nature/grace and creation/redemption schemes often only refer to the church as an afterthought. That such is the case, I suspect, betrays the ahistorical character of such theologies. For example, I think it is telling that such theologies, while appearing Christologically orthodox, in fact leave Jesus behind once they begin to "work out the practical implications". [IGC Hauerwas 1995, 156 n13]; see also Hauerwas 2003 xxi: "I came increasingly to appreciate how the more "orthodox" Christologies failed to do justice to the scriptural portrayal of Jesus.";

¹²³ Responding to criticisms of his widely read popular book *Resident Aliens* (1989) Hauerwas and his co-author William Willimon wrote in 1995 that they were "puzzled by the criticism that the book is "unrealistic" that the church we want does not exist. The whole point of the book is that the church we want *does* exist." [IGC Hauerwas 1995, 57]; Fergusson's portrayal was cited and supported by Robin Gill in chapter one of his *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 1999; it was subsequently challenged by Sam Wells in a 2002 article on *How Common Worship Forms Local Character*. Wells claimed that Fergusson was suggesting that "Hauerwas's Church is in large measure a fantasy, or is inevitably or implicitly a rare Mennonite phenomenon". His article attempts to refute this by tracing an illustrative sequence of significant practices of *ordinary* Christian worship, naming skills taught, habits formed, virtues acquired and notions shaped by the practice of the liturgy. [in JSCE, 2002, 66] Fergusson cites but does not respond to Wells' article in his article on Worship in the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 21, 1, Spring 2003, pp7-20; in a footnote to his 2004 postscript Hauerwas recounts a telephone conversation with Jeffrey Stout after reading *Democracy and Tradition* in manuscript. Hauerwas asks Stout: Where can I find this account of democracy materially instantiated? Stout replies: in the same place you could find your account of the church... PTF Hauerwas 2004 n46 p237

¹²⁴ Wells (1998) wants Hauerwas to eschew spatial metaphors for the church's witness (which he believes encourage the 'sectarian' criticism) and focus on the Church as existing in a new time. [Wells, 1998, 142 – Here he acknowledges Kenneson (2000) as the original inspiration for this point.] While he believes Hauerwas' work is thoroughly eschatological, he argues that Hauerwas fails to articulate these eschatological themes (of patience, martyrdom, non-violence, hope for an end to evil and suffering) in relation to the divine sovereignty in history. [Wells 1998, 142ff] Doing this would help answer the charges of fideism (by the eschaton functioning akin to MacIntyre's teleology as the *end* of the story) and of a deficient doctrine of

Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems, remained critical of his account of creation.¹²⁵ Wells and Nation's 2000 collection of essays by prominent British sympathisers offered a variety of constructively critical responses to Hauerwas' work.¹²⁶ Important among these were Nigel Biggar's criticism of Hauerwas' lack of commitment to liberal democracy¹²⁷ and Linda Woodhead's discussion of his relationship to women. Woodhead argues that "despite Hauerwas' failure to adopt a gendered perspective, the enterprise of doing so is validated by the theological revolution which his work has set in train" and is "wholly congruent" with his understanding of the contextual nature of theology and faith and his emphasis on "human finitude and sinfulness".¹²⁸ She hails him as a pioneer of 'embodied theology'.¹²⁹ However, she is also critical of Hauerwas' 'silence' on questions of gender¹³⁰ and the way in which his work is "informed by largely unconscious male interests and agendas".¹³¹ He is guilty of gender blindness.¹³² His attention to the 'public' violence of war eclipses violence against women experienced within the family.¹³³ His critique of liberalism and self-actualising notions of liberation is insensitive to the ways in which many poor and working class women remain outside of the discourse of liberalism.¹³⁴ She wants him to overcome his (Milbankian) 'meta-scruples' about sociology and attend more positively to social scientific studies which could inform his concern for engagement with concrete and

creation (by understanding creation as the beginning of the story which has this end). [Wells, 1998, 156-9; it is in relation to creation that Wells here emphasises the importance of Milbank for Hauerwas] Finally, he believes it would enable Hauerwas to articulate his attempt to speak "beyond tragedy" in terms of the 'ironic' perspective offered by eschatology. [Wells 1998, 164ff]

¹²⁵ see n 118 above

¹²⁶ Wells & Nation ed. 2000, *Faithfulness and Fortitude*. These essays by 'friends' of Hauerwas are often celebratory, but also make some sharp criticisms.

¹²⁷ Nigel Biggar complains of Hauerwas' inconsistency in relation to the role of the state and accuses him of sounding too much like an American libertarian. He also rejects Hauerwas' linkage of liberalism with belligerent nationalism and concomitantly, his pacifism. [Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 156, 157]; Hauerwas is "quite wrong" to say that "Christians would be ill advised to try to rescue the liberal project either in its epistemological or political form" *ibid.* 159 quoting AC Hauerwas 1999, 35

¹²⁸ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 163

¹²⁹ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 165

¹³⁰ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 166

¹³¹ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 167

¹³² Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 171

¹³³ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 173

¹³⁴ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 177-9

particular social situations.¹³⁵ She critiques the totalising style of Hauerwas' talk of 'the story' and 'the world', adding from a gendered point of view the further questions of "Whose Church and Which Narrative?".¹³⁶ Her critique is ultimately sympathetic (pointing also to counter examples where Hauerwas displays awareness of the significance of ethnicity, racism and class division.¹³⁷) while crediting Hauerwas' "theological sensitivity to the embodied and material nature of creaturely existence" as the cue to which she has been responding and urging him to make a similar response.¹³⁸ His response to Woodhead's piece could be termed contrite, "she has shown how my way of working should have led me to deal more directly with gender than I have done". He claims that "what bothered me was not the feminism, but the theory being used on behalf of feminist causes".¹³⁹ In the same volume, Ann Loades takes it that "Stanley Hauerwas is as much a feminist as I am"¹⁴⁰ – is "deeply grateful" for Hauerwas' attention to the social and cultural issues surrounding the abortion debate and points out that "he is, after all, one of the very few theologians from any tradition to have reflected on the theological importance of children in Christian communities".¹⁴¹

More recently, Debra Dean Murphy has commented on these critiques of Hauerwas from Albrecht and Woodhead, agreeing with them that Hauerwas pays insufficient attention to violence against women, but arguing that there are disputable theological premises which inform their reliance upon "women's experience" and "sociology" respectively. Here she echoes Hauerwas' line of self-defence, that he is not opposed to feminism but to prior philosophical and methodological

¹³⁵ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 188

¹³⁶ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 182

¹³⁷ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 165-6

¹³⁸ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 187

¹³⁹ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 327; It is interesting that when Jeffrey Stout introduces his critique of Hauerwas [with MacIntyre and Milbank] he claims that "my criticisms of them are in some large measure feminist in inspiration". [Stout 2004, 11] In his response to Stout, Hauerwas claims that "my problem with some forms of feminism has never been the just claims I believe women have made, but that too often the idiom of religious feminisms has been Protestant liberalism." [PTF Hauerwas 2004, n15 p224]

¹⁴⁰ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 233

¹⁴¹ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 255

commitments particular feminist theorists have made, which are not constitutive of a commitment to justice for women.¹⁴²

Another more recent theological debate in which Hauerwas has been prominent is an ongoing debate about the place of ecclesiology in Karl Barth's theology, in which the principals have been Reinhard Hutter, Nicholas Healey and Joseph Mangina.¹⁴³ Hauerwas offered his main contribution to this in *With The Grain of The Universe* in 2001 and Stout comments in *Democracy and Tradition* that this debate shows signs of developing into a substantive theological controversy.¹⁴⁴

Jeffrey Stout's Critique

The critique of Hauerwas in Jeffrey Stout's award winning¹⁴⁵ and seminal 2004 work *Democracy and Tradition*¹⁴⁶ marks a watershed in the reception of Hauerwas' work in and beyond America. The reasons for this claim require some explanation. Stout is a religion scholar, not a theologian and his book does not develop original first order *theological* criticisms of Hauerwas's position. Stout's primary concern is with Hauerwas's influence on Christians in America - in particular on younger Christians who are involved in some way in the academic study of theology – and their attitudes to liberal democracy. Stout, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, is a powerful figure within the North American academic community, a respected scholar and deputy president of the American Academy of Religion in 2004-5. *Democracy and Tradition* deserves separate and more substantial consideration here, because it is already being hailed as a landmark publication in the field of religion and political theory. His discussion of Hauerwas, without necessarily offering the most important theological criticisms of his work, may well prove to be the most influential engagement with Hauerwas' thinking to emerge

¹⁴² Debra Dean Murphy: "Community, character and gender: women and the work of Stanley Hauerwas" in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (3): 338-355 (2002)

¹⁴³ for references see WGU Hauerwas 2001, n41; also Joseph Mangina SJT 56 (4): 427-443

¹⁴⁴ This is somewhat patronising to Hauerwas, in that Stout is implying too many of his ecclesiological concerns are 'insubstantive', tilting at 'straw men'...

¹⁴⁵ The book was awarded the AAR 2004 Award for Excellence in Constructive-Reflective Scholarship

¹⁴⁶ Stout 2004

thus far from any single academic.¹⁴⁷ This is so because, while many other major and minor academics have taken aim and taken offence at Hauerwas, few of Stout's stature have taken him quite so seriously in a major publication. Stout is a big beast in American study of religion and he has devoted a big chunk of a big book to Hauerwas. *Democracy and Tradition* therefore marks out an academic dispute which is self-consciously joined as a political act, as a power struggle. Written post 9/11 and in the middle of George W. Bush's first administration, Stout's book names the 'front' where Hauerwas engages 'the secular' and the ground he has gained there, as a crucial site of political and intellectual activity in America at the beginning of the 21st century.

Hauerwas, alongwith John Milbank and Alasdair MacIntyre – together Stout labels them “the new traditionalists” – have in a very direct sense, provoked Stout to write this book, which is intended as a response to and a strong critique of their work. Stout considers Hauerwas' influence within seminaries and divinity schools to be immense, and because so great, also to be very dangerous. He is concerned that under Hauerwas' influence, many Christians within the United States are becoming increasingly disengaged from democracy, holding it in low esteem (“as morally and spiritually empty”¹⁴⁸) and devaluing participation in the political process at a time when the pressures on American democracy demand precisely the opposite response.¹⁴⁹

The short version of Stout's position is that he seeks to rehabilitate liberal democracy, understood as itself a secularized (but not secularist) tradition, as a public conversation which can be entered from many other traditions, by all those willing to participate in “a community of reason exchangers”.

¹⁴⁷ Gustafson's famous attack set the terms of a long running controversy, but did not promise to move the substantive debate forward in the way Stout's book does.

¹⁴⁸ Stout 2004, 2

¹⁴⁹ witness Stephen Webb's remark in a 2002 First Things article on Hauerwas: “Some of his students have told me that they are so alienated from American politics that they no longer vote.” First Things 124 (June/July 2002): 12-14.

He does this by splitting the difference between Rawls and Hauerwas and advocating a pragmatic expressivism in the manner of Hegel, Dewey and Emerson, which will respect the entitlement of multiple traditions and multifarious individuals to participate in political discourse without abandoning their deepest senses of particularity, including their religious beliefs.

The difference is split by Stout applying strong pressure to positions on both sides of the argument. One of his central claims is that “democracy is not necessarily an expression of secularism”¹⁵⁰. Against Rawls and his followers (whose position he believes dominates law schools and ethics centres in the way Hauerwas’ position has captured divinity schools) Stout argues for a revised understanding of political liberalism which allows that religious reasons are fully acceptable within public debate.¹⁵¹ He believes that viewed pragmatically, such an understanding fits better within America’s existing political practices¹⁵² and that Rawls’ attempt to veto religious reasoning and insist people accept a social contract as the basis of political debate, defines public reason too tightly. Stout believes that this has been a provocation to and an occasion for the antiliberals:

The contractarian position has a descriptive component and a normative component. The descriptive component is an account of what the norms of democratic political culture involve. It distils a rigorist interpretation of the idea of public reason out of various commitments that are found in that culture. The normative component endorses a principle of restraint as a consequence of that interpretation. I worry that religious individuals who accept the descriptive component of contractarianism as a faithful reconstruction of what the norms of democratic political culture involve will, understandably, view this as a reason for withdrawing from that culture. Why should one identify with the democratic process of reason-exchange if the norms implicit in that process are what the contractarians say they are? I believe this thought is one of the main reasons that antiliberal traditionalists like Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre and John Milbank have largely displaced Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and the liberation theologians as intellectual authorities in the seminaries, divinity schools and church-affiliated colleges of the wealthier democracies.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Stout 2004, 11

¹⁵¹ Stout 2004, Ch 2 pp63-91; Stout acknowledges his debt to Nicholas Wolterstoff in this part of his argument, see Wolterstoff 1997/Audi & Wolterstoff 1997

¹⁵² He suggests for example that a Rawls like position has trouble accepting Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King within the public sphere.

¹⁵³ Stout 2004, 75

Stout's hope is that by defining political liberalism in this secularized but not secularist fashion, he has drawn the sting from the antiliberals critique. He can then go on to argue that if this is what liberalism 'really' is, Hauerwas' polemics against it are misguided. This is the burden of two chapters in Stout's book devoted to Hauerwas' position. He pays Hauerwas far more attention than Milbank and slightly more than MacIntyre. This is because he believes it is Hauerwas' (excessive) rhetoric that is leading the charge and winning disciples. His specific criticisms are that Hauerwas' polemics¹⁵⁴ are too generalised, his attacks on 'liberalism' too blunt, his failure to talk about justice too persistent.¹⁵⁵ Stout believes that the root of the problem is the conjunction of Yoder's church-world distinction with MacIntyre's anti-liberalism in Hauerwas' work, leading to a rigidly dualistic account of the church-world relationship. The two falls involved here – Yoder's Constantinian fall and MacIntyre's Enlightenment fall - leave the world 'according to Hauerwas' in a "doubly darkened condition.. not only outside of the church but after virtue".¹⁵⁶ Stout appeals to other orthodox theologians such as Hunsinger/Barth and Wolterstoff to argue that Hauerwas' theology of the world is too little illumined by grace or open to the work of the Spirit. The ecclesiology used to draw the contrast is seen by Stout as highly idealised and lacking in humility and realism.

Stout wants Hauerwas to speak more in public, especially in the post 9/11 situation. He wants him to clarify his position on justice and be more concrete about what action pacifism should lead to, above all, he wants him to stop distancing himself from the democratic project. He points to the support for democracy in the work of "theologically conservative but politically progressive"

¹⁵⁴ Reviewing *The Hauerwas Reader* in *Modern Theology* 20:3, July 2004, Bernd Wannenwetsch writes: "In Hauerwas' opinion, the urgent and sometimes shrill tone of polemics is necessitated by the fact that the web of ideas that are prevalent in a liberal society (such as the public/private divide) has become so tight that it fits people like a second skin of which they are unaware." (p462)

¹⁵⁵ Stout in fact accuses his friend of lacking key scholarly virtues and persisting in the vices of unfriendliness (in the Aristotelian sense) and negligence: Stout 2004, 157

¹⁵⁶ Stout 2004, 154

thinkers like Nicholas Wolterstoff and George Hunsinger¹⁵⁷ alongwith other orthodox trinitarians like Karl Barth, Robert Adams and Oliver O'Donovan by way of argument that Christian theological orthodoxy "is not the source of the new traditionalism's antidemocratic sentiments or tendencies".¹⁵⁸

Charles Reynolds comments on the dust jacket that "this book should be taught alongside Rawls in law schools and Hauerwas in seminaries".¹⁵⁹ Hauerwas himself has published a response as Postscript to his 2004 volume, *Performing The Faith*¹⁶⁰ in which he welcomes the book as making possible "a fresh conversation" between advocates of liberal democracies and those like him who worry that the standard justifications of democracy in liberal theory "render strong Christian convictions politically irrelevant".¹⁶¹ He suggests that on the evidence of this book "Stout and I now seem to agree more than we disagree"¹⁶² and is enthusiastic about how seriously Stout takes theology in developing his argument.¹⁶³

Weighing the Criticisms

Any theologian who attracts intense scholarly attention will also attract significant criticism. When their style is as combative and their position as distinctive as Hauerwas's, all the more so.

Reviewing the criticisms, a number of them point out imbalances and shortfalls in Hauerwas treatment of dogmatic themes. A first response to weighing these criticisms should involve placing them and Hauerwas on a larger scale theological map. Sam Wells has argued that Hauerwas' differences from Gloria Albrecht "do

¹⁵⁷ Stout 2004, 11

¹⁵⁸ Stout 2004, 298; Stout's concern is a pragmatic one for the effects of Hauerwas' work – so that his preference for Hunsinger and Wolterstoff is not because he accepts their theology but because he believes it to be less harmful.

¹⁵⁹ Stout 2004, Publisher's review on dust jacket.

¹⁶⁰ Hauerwas 2004

¹⁶¹ Hauerwas 2004, 215

¹⁶² Stout 2004, 216

¹⁶³ Stout 2004, 217

not genuinely lie in her diagnosis of pervasive violence. They lie more in his confidence in orthodox theology, particularly ecclesiology...”.¹⁶⁴

The Company Hauerwas Keeps

There are therefore what we might call ‘multiple sets’ of theological judgments involved in determining whether Hauerwas’ (or anyone’s) theological position is or is not seen to be ‘in good company’. One set of judgments will involve taking positions on key dogmatic questions about trinitarian belief, Christology, atonement and salvation etc. In one sense, Hauerwas is dogmatically conservative, committed to the language of the Apostles and Nicene creeds and consistently respectful of the dogmatic authority of the *magisterium*. However, his alignment with postliberal theology, with its antifoundationalist and intratextual orientations also distances him from more traditional conservative stances and commits him to a ‘pragmatic’ theological epistemology rooted in the church’s performance of the faith. Here he is keeping company with Lindbeck and Frei and also, though less often commented on, with Lesslie Newbigin.¹⁶⁵ Here too, we can place his strong commitment to Barth and his admiration for the work of Webster, Gunton, and Hunsinger as well as his deep affinities with the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. However, Hauerwas’ postliberalism is then given a further twist by his alignment with Yoder’s ecclesiology and the insistence on non-violence as a basic criterion for the church’s faithful performance as witness to the gospel. This moves him into a much narrower theological spectrum and distances him from his postliberal allies.

These various inflections of his position display Hauerwas as a rare (even improbable) bird indeed, whose theological colours are truly distinctive. One of the real benefits of this is that in the boldness and brilliance of his attempts to demonstrate why such an unlikely mix is absolutely necessary to the gospel, Hauerwas has intrigued those in each theological ‘camp’ by his insistence on

¹⁶⁴ Wells 1998, 72

¹⁶⁵ see the final chapter of *After Christendom?* and IGC Hauerwas 1995, 51: “[*Resident Aliens*] fits into a growing symphony to which many have contributed... Lesslie Newbigin, George Lindbeck, Will Campbell”

consorting with the 'other'. He has, through his own hospitality to them in his work, introduced to one another people who were substantially theological strangers. In particular, he has almost single handedly been responsible for dramatically increasing the attention paid to the work of John Howard Yoder by Catholic and Reformed scholars.

He is, for this reason, a distinctive kind of 'ecumenical' theologian, although he rarely uses the term, drawing in decisive ways from Catholic, Reformed and Anabaptist sources. His theological project involves a deliberate attempt to mix or fuse positions which have often been polarised within the historical church.¹⁶⁶ So his immense respect and love for the Roman Catholic tradition is qualified by his commitment to the priesthood of women, while his enthusiasm for Anabaptist ecclesiology is qualified by his apparent lack of interest in believer's baptism. His reservations about Reformed approaches to the doctrine of creation and the place of the church in the world are qualified by his strong identification with the theology of Karl Barth. His enthusiasm for Barth is qualified by his conviction that Barth's ecclesiology is insufficiently catholic.

In his latest book, he acknowledges his "ambiguous ecclesial position" as "one of the besetting problems of his work".¹⁶⁷ It is however, undoubtedly one of the most fascinating things about his work for many who read him and arguably has strong resonances for a third or fourth 'ecumenical generation' audience in the churches, who have strong 'post-denominational' instincts.¹⁶⁸ While he is deeply concerned about disunity within the church, he has taken little to do with formal ecumenical activities, acting more as an ecumenical entrepreneur – setting up unscheduled

¹⁶⁶ Although Sam Wells, commenting on Hauerwas' "curious ecclesial position" notes that "While it is possible for him to glean the best fruits from each tradition, it is less straightforward for the whole Church to do so" in Wells 1998, 66

¹⁶⁷ PTF Hauerwas 2004, n36 p233

¹⁶⁸ Hauerwas' work is much discussed within the contemporary 'emerging church' movement which is associated with post-modern strands of evangelicalism in North America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. The ekklesia project of which Hauerwas was a founder member could be seen as an institutional focus for this ecclesial ambiguity; located primarily in cyberspace at www.ekklesia.com

meetings and forming unholy alliances without waiting for ecumenical protocols to give him permission.

This strategy has made its mark on more formal ecumenical proceedings, so that Hauerwas' work was one of the key markers for the recent WCC Study Programme on Ecclesiology and Ethics and is quoted in the final report as well as in associated publications by Duncan Forrester and Lewis Mudge.¹⁶⁹

However, it is probably a mistake to confuse the intense level of interest in Hauerwas' work (and of admiration and affection for him as a personality) with as substantial a level of agreement with it. In his *First Things* review of *Democracy and Tradition*, Gilbert Meilander judges that Jeffrey Stout is simply mistaken in his assessment of the dominant influence Hauerwas has in US theological schools.¹⁷⁰ Hauerwas' multi-source (in some respects almost 'open source' given his fondness for collaboration) theological project intrigues many for whom it is a portrait in which they see themselves standing alongside strangers at a party they are not sure they ever went to or wanted to go to. While he has attracted numbers of brilliant graduate students who are, with their own inflections, now extending a recognisably Hauerwasian tradition of sorts¹⁷¹, the number of those who are fully invested in Hauerwas' project is surely far less than Stout seems to suggest. Being seen at a Hauerwas party is not the same as signing up to a Hauerwas Party, should such a thing be deemed to exist.

Going Quiet

This pairing of interest with dissent is clear from the review of criticisms of Hauerwas' work already outlined above. I want to return here to those which I believe are most significant for the argument of this thesis.

¹⁶⁹ see Forrester 1997, Mudge 1997

¹⁷⁰ Meilander Review in *First Things* 142 (April 2004): 25-31.

¹⁷¹ e.g. D. Stephen Long; William T. Cavanaugh;

The most telling criticism of Hauerwas I have encountered comes from Sam Wells, one of his friendliest critics who is now also a regular collaborator and co-author with Hauerwas. Feminist and pro-liberationist theologian Gloria Albrecht had published an extremely hostile critique of Hauerwas' work in her 1995 book, *The Character of our Communities*¹⁷². While many of its criticisms were, in Wells' phrase 'absurdly overstated'¹⁷³ and some of her misunderstandings of Hauerwas seemed wilful, her attention to the concrete situation of the poor and victims of violence, especially women and people of colour in America, contrasted strongly with Hauerwas' lack of attention to these themes. Her critique did not displace Hauerwas, but in important respects it can be seen to have 'discredited' him. This is frankly admitted by Sam Wells, whose friendly critique of Hauerwas has been influential on Hauerwas' own development.¹⁷⁴ While defending him from her excesses¹⁷⁵, Wells acknowledges that "When all this is said, Albrecht's critique of Hauerwas is still an important one, She relentlessly points out *the ways in which Hauerwas' approach needs yet further narrative display it is not to be limited by its own examples*. There is no use proposing virtue if the virtues one advocates are not genuinely true to salvation."¹⁷⁶

Wells translation of Albrecht's critique is both dis-arming¹⁷⁷ and extremely forceful. "Needs yet further narrative display" combines a basic affirmation of Hauerwas' approach with a recognition that the scope of Hauerwas' examples has been too

¹⁷² Albrecht, 1995

¹⁷³ Wells 1998, 70

¹⁷⁴ Wells is now a key collaborator with Hauerwas, co-authoring and co-editing work with him in recent years. Hauerwas has consciously taken on a number of Wells criticisms and suggestions in his work since 1998. It is an interesting and I would argue in its own way a 'virtuous' example of a more senior scholar publicly acknowledging the influence of a younger critic.

¹⁷⁵ Wells is, I think absolutely right when he points out that "His differences from Albrecht do not genuinely lie in her diagnosis of pervasive violence. They lie more in his confidence in orthodox theology, particularly ecclesiology, to renew practices which address violence faithfully and truthfully, and in his misgivings about the proposals to be made once Albrecht's diagnosis is finished." Wells 1998, 72

¹⁷⁶ Wells, 1998, 71 (emphasis added)

¹⁷⁷ Perhaps in this case virtue provokes virtue. Wells (under Hauerwas' influence) self-consciously tries to write non-violently. It is possible to speculate that without his pacific translation of Albrecht's angry criticisms, the irascible Hauerwas would have proved less able to hear what was important in them.

narrow and in fact, narrower than he means it to be¹⁷⁸. This is a similar judgment to that of Linda Woodhead who argues that “he has not yet followed through some of the more radical implications of his own pioneering theological project”¹⁷⁹.

Elsewhere, Wells uses the phrase “Hauerwas is quiet on economics” – an understated formula which nevertheless names the problem exactly. The most disturbing feature of Hauerwas’ huge body of work, of all his talk across an intriguing and demanding range of topics, is what is missing from it. Why, we may ask, has Hauerwas so often fallen silent on subjects where he should have spoken out? And why has he remained silent on certain questions for so long?

I am not sure there are clear answers to these questions or that anyone has properly uncovered them. Among those most appreciative of Hauerwas, there is a kind of bafflement about why this perennially loud theologian/ethicist is so quiet on the subject of violence and discrimination against women, poverty and systemic disadvantage within and beyond America and the ongoing struggle with racism in American life.

He is quieter on these issues than Yoder, Barth or John Paul II¹⁸⁰, not to mention Dorothy Day. Friendly critics and collaborators are dismayed by this, because in their substantial agreement with him, to take just Wells and Woodhead, they see nothing in his broader approach which requires this or even promotes it. In fact, they believe the opposite to be true, that his work calls for and enables a clear Christian witness in respect of such things. Even Jeffrey Stout, who believes he has identified deep structural weaknesses in Hauerwas’ theological approach, which leave him unable to give an adequate account of ‘the world’, seems ultimately to

¹⁷⁸ See Hauerwas’ comment that “Wells understands me better than I understand myself” and also Arne Rasmusson’s discussion in Rasmusson 1995, 332ff of accusations that Hauerwas is socially and politically ‘conservative’

¹⁷⁹ Nation & Wells ed. 2000, 161

¹⁸⁰ so that Max Stackhouse can argue on the question of social justice “I agree with the Pope not Stanley” - Max L. Stackhouse, “In the Company of Hauerwas,” *Journal for Christian Theological Research* [http://apu.edu/~CTRF/articles/1997_articles/stackhouse.html] 2:1 (1997)

find Hauerwas' lack of attention to questions of justice 'out of character'. It has to be said also, that the section of Hauerwas' response to Stout where he tries to address this, casting back to "very early" writings from the 1970s and 1980s, is among the lamest of all his writings. He acknowledges that "Stout may well think that this response is a day late and a dollar short", but seems not to understand how many others, much more sympathetic to his position than Stout, are likely to think just that and more so.

The criticisms of Hauerwas on more traditional dogmatic lines can also be seen to accumulate around certain key themes, like his treatment of creation and his account of the person of Christ. These too are areas where his understanding of the coincidence of dogmatics and ethics may need further narrative display and Hauerwas is slowly responding to some of them. For example, in *With The Grain of the Universe*, his strong identification with Barth's Christology may dispel some doubts about that area of his theology. His contributions to the debate about Barth's ecclesiology may also help to clarify the questions about relating Christology and ecclesiology raised by Sam Wells and David Fergusson.

Coming to Judgment

Scholarly debate about Hauerwas' work shows no sign of abating, although as we have argued, Stout's critique in particular, may well prove to be a watershed. Inevitably, after consideration of that debate, there must be a coming to judgment.

Dogmatic Judgment

At least as important as understanding the distinctives of Hauerwas' approach, is a sober assessment of what it holds in common with broader theological currents. Surveys of trends in twentieth century theology by Adrian Hastings,¹⁸¹ Rowan Williams¹⁸² and David Ford¹⁸³ all point to a resurgence in theologies which

¹⁸¹ Hastings et al ed. 2002

¹⁸² essay introduction to Robinson 2002

emphasized trinitarian ‘orthodoxy’ in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the period in which Hauerwas has been most active and influential. Hauerwas is a type of post-liberal theologian, self-consciously aligned with Barth and the ‘new Barthians’ and any theological judgment which dissents substantially from their project must also be unsympathetic to his. To acknowledge this is to understand that many of the criticisms offered by a theologian such as Albrecht, while focused on Hauerwas, would apply equally to all post-liberals or evangelicals. That is, they turn out to be substantive disagreements with this broad theological orientation *per se* and in this sense, not only, or even chiefly, criticisms of Hauerwas.

That said, the work of (at least) Banner, Gunton, Fergusson and Werpehowski makes a persuasive cumulative case from within this evangelical/post-liberal space, for the need to offer dogmatic correction to Hauerwas’ ‘under-determined’ accounts of creation and Christology, without showing these to be intrinsically ‘incorrigible’ in relation to his thinking as a whole.

Analytic Judgment

The case that Hauerwas’ criticism of ‘liberalism’ is excessive I judge to be partially justified, although Stephen Webb’s caution about his critics taking him “both too seriously and not seriously enough”¹⁸⁴ may apply here. Missed by many critics is the way in which Hauerwas’ capacity for disdain and even cynicism about “the West” and “America” takes him beyond the characterisation of ‘new traditionalism’ and keys in to the similarly excessive critiques of those constructions in Foucault and in post-colonial criticism. Much of Hauerwas’ critique of liberalism is inseparable from his pacifism, which, as we have already noted, marks him as a distinctive kind of post-liberal theologian and social theorist. It also represents a peculiar and unpredictable fault line within theology and political theory, which is often honoured

¹⁸³ *The Christian Century*, April 5, 2000, pp. 388-391. This was the third in a series of articles reviewing the development of ‘British theology’

¹⁸⁴ Stephen Webb, *First Things* 124 (June/July 2002): 12-14

as a kind of prophetic ‘other’ to their own stance by those who justify (‘just’) state sanctioned violence and coercion.

The intelligibility of Hauerwas’ stance is here somewhat scrambled by the co-existence of deeply radical stances on these questions with his quietness and apparent conservatism on questions of social and economic justice. It is possible that what is often taken for incoherence here may be related in part to the unfamiliarity of such a combination. On balance, however, it seems that here too there is a need for ‘correction’. There is a need for greatly increased attention to issues of poverty and economic oppression and the ways gender and ethnicity impact upon how they are experienced. There is also a need for a more positive and developed account of how Christians may witness to a non-violent politics within and beyond the state formations in which they find themselves.

Practical Judgment

In his discussion of congregational formation, Lewis Mudge quotes Robert Bellah’s concern that Hauerwas (among others) fails to explain to us “how we get there from here”¹⁸⁵. Mudge ponders the dilemma that while “thin” traditions of church formation lack distinctiveness, “thick” traditions (such as Hauerwas advocates) are ineffective in helping Christians to live as disciples in the larger society.¹⁸⁶ Granted that Hauerwas would dispute terms here, Bellah and Mudge are not far from the criticism Wells also brings, that Hauerwas fails to offer a sufficiently developed and expansive (or thick) account of how Christian practice takes place in the world:

Hauerwas’ strongest argument against those who assume his advocacy of non-violence is sectarian is that the Church requires and embodies a different form of politics. The reason why his response to the charge of sectarianism has not been completely convincing is that he has not yet fully displayed what he expects the politics of the Church to be. Much of his work amply demonstrates that the Church *needs* a politics, but with some exceptions this has not been mapped out in detail.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Mudge 1998 78, quoting from Bellah’s essay in *Christianity and Civil Society*, Maryland, Orbis, 1995

¹⁸⁶ Mudge 1998 79

¹⁸⁷ Wells 1998, 140

The defence that this expects too much from Hauerwas seems to fail on the grounds that while his output is undiminished, there is too much repetition and not enough elaboration. Again we find a need for correction and in particular, supplementation of his work in relation to congregational practice. In his review of Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*, Hauerwas' former student, now a leading Radical Orthodoxy collaborator, Stephen Long, argues against Stout's characterisation of Radical Orthodoxy as 'sectarian' citing its desire for a "more mediating" but "less accommodating" relation between church and society.¹⁸⁸ This is the kind of correction needed in Hauerwas' project, that fuller attention be given to the practices which mediate *how* aliens are *resident*.

Hauerwas in Scotland: Valuing Hauerwas As Interlocutor for Scottish Practical Theology

I now want to offer an argument for Hauerwas' importance and usefulness as an interlocutor for practical theology in Scotland. In this final section of the chapter, I ask the question: does Hauerwas travel?¹⁸⁹ i.e. how far is his theology in general and his critique of liberalism in particular relevant to the situation of the church in Scotland and to the debate about what constitutes 'public' theology within Scotland?

In one sense, it is obvious that Hauerwas has already travelled. There is a tradition of 'Hauerwas reception' in the UK and in Scotland which we have already noted and Hauerwas' role as 2001 Gifford lecturer confirmed this. His presence too as a contributor to the *Festschrift* for Duncan Forrester marks his place within a debate

¹⁸⁸ Review in *Contemporary Pragmatism* 1:1, June 2004, pp171-187, quotation from p174

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Webb argues that Hauerwas is (like Niebuhr) "obsessed with America" and that "something of the American exceptionalism that Hauerwas so vehemently rejects comes back to haunt his ecclesiology, wherein the Church becomes an entity set apart from all other institutions and lacking any obligation to enter into reciprocal relationships out of fear that that would compromise or imperil its moral superiority." *First Things* 124 (June/July 2002): 12-14; similar points are made by Bernd Wannenwetsch in his review of *The Hauerwas Reader* in *Modern Theology* 20:3, July 2004, where Hauerwas is wryly compared to The Lone Ranger; and by Rusty Reno, "Stanley's work is overdetermined by a reaction against 'Americanism'." quoted by Hauerwas in PTF Hauerwas 2004, 236

about the future of ‘public theology’ here.¹⁹⁰ Hauerwas is therefore very definitely on the theological map and within the theological conversation within Scotland. There are, however, few signs of anything like the level of influence on theology and church life in Scotland, which Stout credits him with in North America.¹⁹¹

Hauerwas’ importance to Scottish ‘public’ theology lies in his attractiveness as a missional and ecclesial theologian for a ‘church after Christendom’¹⁹² and in the value of his critique of liberalism for theological contributions to the post-devolution debate about the nature of politics in Scotland. These twin themes are introduced here and developed more fully in the final chapter of the thesis.

Mission After Christendom: The Dilemmas of Decline

In his 1998 foreword to Sam Wells’ book, Hauerwas suggested that the relative weakness of the churches within the United Kingdom (the loss of pretensions to being ‘in control’) is a reason for the more positive reception his thought has received here.¹⁹³ Overall church membership within Scotland has declined sharply since its peak in the late 1950s, with the decline of Presbyterian membership and attendance particularly acute. Despite the continued legal recognition of the special status of the Church of England in England and the Church of Scotland in Scotland¹⁹⁴ these churches have experienced a cultural and social disestablishment directly related to their declining reach within the population. This material disempowerment of the churches and reduction of their influence has significant implications for ecclesiology and missiology.

Ironic Reframing

¹⁹⁰ Hauerwas’ contribution is chapter 17 in Storrar & Morton ed. 2004

¹⁹¹ Although David Fergusson’s most recent judgment in *Church State and Civil Society* (2004) states that “Hauerwas’ approach to Christian ethics is enormously influential, perhaps surprisingly so within the established churches of the United Kingdom”. Fergusson 2004, 99

¹⁹² This is the title of English baptist theologian Stuart Murray’s 2004 book. Murray 2004

¹⁹³ Hauerwas’ preface to Wells 1998, xi

¹⁹⁴ Through the Act of Union and the Articles Declaratory

Within Scotland, the claims of the Church of Scotland to be ‘a national church representative of the Christian faith of the Scottish people’ appear increasingly unstable and are under pressure from within as well as beyond the church. This changed status of the church within UK society was identified in Duncan Forrester’s 1985 remarks to Gustafson, as a major reason for the growing interest in Hauerwas’ work within the UK. Gustafson’s subsequent characterisation of Hauerwas approach as a “temptation” itself bears witness to its potential appeal in a situation where the church has lost influence and power. Hauerwas’ theology can be experienced as spiritually empowering for churches experiencing social and political marginalisation, because it offers them a new way in which to think about their role and through that, about their decline.¹⁹⁵ By renouncing the desire to ‘rule’ and to be ‘in control’, by opting for a radical theological reframing of questions about ‘power’ and ‘validation’, those within the churches are enabled to experience a re-empowerment and renewal of confidence in their mission. (In this sense, interest in Hauerwas within the UK can be aligned with the positive reception given to the work of Lesslie Newbigin, whose work Hauerwas and Willimon have identified with¹⁹⁶ and who also sought to renew “confidence in the gospel” as “public truth” within the declining churches in Britain and Europe.¹⁹⁷)

This theological exchange brokered by Hauerwas therefore has an ironic character to it, as Sam Wells points out in his characterisation of Hauerwas’ journey as moving “from tragedy to irony”.¹⁹⁸ Those threatened by a fatalistic and tragic narrative of the church’s continuing decline within Scotland, are led by Hauerwas into ‘the ironic temptation’.¹⁹⁹ Gustafson’s formulation fails to capture the attractiveness of Hauerwas’ position – what draws people is not a desire to be “sectarian” but the lure of this ironic reversal. The question is whether such an irony

¹⁹⁵ IGC Hauerwas 1995, p39: “God is killing Protestantism and perhaps Christianity in America and we deserve it.”

¹⁹⁶ IGC Hauerwas 1995 53: “like Lesslie Newbigin, we believe it is time for the church to recognize that it is in a missionary situation in the very culture it helped create.”

¹⁹⁷ Newbigin 1989, 242-244

¹⁹⁸ Wells 1997, pp164-180

¹⁹⁹ Hauerwas in Wells 1997: “If my work is a temptation to the British I hope it is one to which they will succumb.”

is at the heart of the Christian gospel, as Hauerwas and Yoder would insist, or whether it is a damaging misconstrual of Christian responsibility to Scottish society.²⁰⁰

Certainly it can be advanced as one missiological reading of the situation of the churches in Scotland. Its willingness to maintain eschatological patience in the face of the marginalisation of the church can be contrasted with the more ambitious 'reclamation' project of Radical Orthodoxy²⁰¹ and also, with the recent calls from the Roman Catholic church for the "reChristianization" of Scotland, although it would also have some deep affinities with both of those projects.

Ecumenical Re-imagining

The implications of Hauerwas' work for missiology are complex; on the one hand the category of 'witness' is central to his theology, on the other hand, he is wary of the church seeking influence and effectiveness, insisting always on the priority of faithful practice, of the church witnessing by "being itself". That this being itself, is also an ecumenical becoming itself, was given a powerful illustration in his final Gifford Lecture in St Andrews in 2001, where Hauerwas concludes his 'Scottish lectures' by assembling a 'trio' of exemplary witnesses: Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder and John Paul II/Dorothy Day. Together these three witnesses from the church's past and present point the way to the church's future in which the three divided strands of the Western church – Radical Reformation, Reformed and Roman Catholic – all bring crucial gifts and insights to enable the church's witness. I have, so far, not encountered any comment within Scottish theology on the particular relevance and power of this ecclesial vision for the churches in Scotland or for the ecumenical movement within Scotland. Yet, the insistence in Hauerwas'

²⁰⁰ Robin Gill's critique of Hauerwas in his *Church Going and Christian Ethics* (2000) is deeply sceptical of such an ironic self-understanding, agreeing with David Fergusson in the charge that Hauerwas is espousing a fantasy ecclesiology.

²⁰¹ PTF Hauerwas 2004, n4 p217: "...I think the most profound difference [between Milbank's work and his] has to do with why I think enduring is so important for how Christians are to learn to live in the world as we find it. Milbank wants Christians to win... a correlative of his defense of Christendom.... Such a difference.. is most clearly apparent in our different understandings of violence and the Christian use of violence."

work on the need for these three traditions to be enriched by each other's particular *charismata* as they become the church catholic is a distinctive contribution to ecclesial theology within Scotland and deserves more attention than it has received. The theme of catholicity in Hauerwas' work also has a strong political resonance, which questions and qualifies the status of other signifiers such as national identity.

Practical Revaluing

A final dimension of post-Christendom ecclesiology in Hauerwas' work, relevant to the Scottish context - in addition to his ironic reframing and ecumenical re-imagining of the church's destiny - lies in what we might call his 'revaluing' of Christian practice. While we have noted with Wells and others the limits of Hauerwas' own development and display of this theme in relation to the weight it carries within his work, it is, nonetheless, a distinctively crafted emphasis within his ecclesiology. His insistence on the church as a politics and on the political significance of the church's practices, particularly its liturgical and sacramental practices (and including preaching) invites churches in Scotland to reconsider the social, cultural and political meanings of their worship and witness. Such a revaluing of practice in Hauerwas' terms, challenges internalised perceptions of worship as private practice, but also challenges dominant cultural descriptions of 'the political', which render the church politically irrelevant. It therefore represents and promotes a simultaneous revision of the significance of church practice and political practice within Scottish society.

Conclusion

In the discussion so far, I have argued that Hauerwas should be read as a theologian and that his ecclesiology is central to his theology. I have suggested that his dictum that "theology entails an ethics and a politics" is best understood by means of three key ecclesial confessions in his work, each of which embodies a challenge to a key tenet of Enlightenment thought: the church is an epistemology; the church is a social ethic and the church is a politics. I have illustrated the major

lines of criticism of his work within contemporary scholarship and offered my own judgment on areas of weakness within his overall approach. Finally, I have argued that, despite how 'thirled' he is to thinking and writing about North America, Hauerwas is a key interlocutor for Scottish practical theology and I have shown how his ecclesiology and his analysis of liberalism relate to the Scottish situation.

In the course of this thesis, these judgments are 'thickened' through the exercise of reading the post 1939 tradition of Scottish 'practical theological engagement with church and society alongside Hauerwas and in the light of his ecclesiological claims. The final chapter of the thesis displays the outcomes of that critical conversation in the form of a claim that practical theology in and of Scotland must be more attentive to, indeed more determined by questions of ecclesiology of the kind Hauerwas raises, while correcting and supplementing his own proposals, in part, with the help of resources from the Scottish tradition exemplified in the work of Baillie, Fraser and Forrester.

Chapter Two

The Witness of The 'Baillie' Commission

"..the Church is called upon to explore the possibilities of its own corporate witness.... There is an important witness which we can bear in the corporate life of the Church as a voluntary society within our larger national society. The Church's word will not be effective if it speaks only by precept and not by example. There is a sense in which we are called upon, not merely to proclaim, but ourselves also to be "the interpretation of God's will in the present crisis." ¹

"It is the Church that has to tell the story"
Donald Baillie²

... it would not be difficult to show historically that the message of the New Testament succeeded in winning acceptance for itself only when and so far as, men did feel themselves.. to be, in the well remembered Vulgate rendering, *peregrini et hospites super terram*.
John Baillie Invitation to Pilgrimage 1942p79

My historical narrative begins with the Baillie Commission and the background to its work in the 1920s and 1930s.³ Although our intentions and methods are different, this means that I take up my narrative at the point where Donald Smith tapers off his important account of "Social Criticism in the Scottish Church 1830-1945"⁴ and also in the period which has been the subject of Stewart J. Brown's important and illuminating work on the social witness of the Church of Scotland.⁵

¹ CIGWPC in Reports to General Assembly 1942, 593

² God Was In Christ, p 203, Baillie (1948)

³ Reformed and Ecumenical Church History in Scotland after 1939 is still relatively thinly researched and written up, with most studies focusing on patterns of decline in church membership and attendance. Given this lack of broader accounts to refer to, this chapter and the two which follow have had to 'fill in' historical background to the specific fore-grounded examples. Achieving a minimal adequate account within the constraints of word length has been a difficult balance, requiring much potentially relevant material to be cut out. The exercise of gathering material from primary sources has convinced me of the importance of a historical memory within practical theology in Scotland and the current (and perhaps increasing) lack of academic locations within which to share and contest readings/narratives of that memory. This suggests that the inter-disciplinary space of Practical Theology and Church History needs to receive greater attention in future and that locations for dissemination and discussion of work need to be activated.

⁴ Smith 1987

⁵ Brown 19

I begin with the work of the Baillie Commission and of its convenor John Baillie, who exercised a major influence over Scottish theology and church life between 1934 and 1959.

Arguably, the work of the Commission merits examination in a PhD by itself, however, two factors may weigh against this. The first is the absence thus far of any accompanying papers directly related to the drafting of the Commission reports, from either John Baillie or any of the other participants. This places severe limits on any attempt to examine in detail the detailed workings of the Commission and the process by which its reports were drafted. The second reservation lies in the fact that a significant concentration of theological attention was directed to the Baillies and the reports of the Baillie Commission in the mid 1990s by two gatherings of leading Scottish and English theologians and church historians. This resulted in two collections of papers, reflecting a high standard of scholarship, which effectively represented the legacy of the brothers and of the Commission within the church and the academy.⁶ A further major addition to Baillie scholarship came with the publication of George Newlands extensively researched theological biography of the two brothers in 2002.⁷

My aim in this chapter is not to duplicate the exemplary work done on John Baillie and the Commission by these scholars. This chapter seeks to build on their work by integrating certain themes they treated separately, by ‘thickening’ some aspects they dealt with sparingly and by *reading for* the distinctive concerns of this thesis – ecclesiology, portrayal of liberal society and church/world relations – in the primary sources, Baillie’s writings and the Commission reports. In a small way I have added directly to the resources of Baillie scholarship by tracing an important Baillie article from 1942 which does not appear in either Fergusson’s or Newlands’

⁶ *Christ, Church and Community* edited by David Fergusson appeared in 1993 and *God’s Will In A Time Of Crisis* edited by Andrew Morton was published by CTPI in the following year.

⁷ John and Donald Baillie: *Transatlantic Theology*; Newlands 2002

bibliographies or in discussions by authors in the two collections.⁸ I have also made fuller reference to certain unpublished manuscripts held in the Baillie Archive than other previous published writings. Through this and my work on Baillie's other writings, I have been able to show at a number of points, that Baillie not only drafted the reports but included almost verbatim, sections from his own work.

Key Texts by John Baillie and the Commission

In May 1940, the Church of Scotland General Assembly established a special *Commission for the Interpretation of God's Will In The Present Crisis*⁹ to be convened by Rev Professor John Baillie, who held the chair of Divinity at New College in Edinburgh¹⁰. The Commission's reports are included in the Reports of the General Assembly from 1941 to 1945. A summary volume, omitting material of more local relevance to the Church of Scotland was published by SCM in 1946 as *God's Will In Our Time*.

Alongside the Reports of the Commission, I reference a number of writings by John Baillie himself. The earliest of these is an unpublished lecture entitled "What is the Church?" delivered to the SCM Theological Conference at Swanwick in January 1938. *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie's theological epistemology was published in 1939. There is a 1940 article in *The Christian Newsletter*, "Does God defend the Right?". These alongwith the Alexander Robertson Lectures, delivered at the University of Glasgow in the Summer of 1941, and published the following year by Oxford University Press as *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, offer the most significant contemporary summaries of Baillie's thinking at the outset of the Commission's

⁸ Newlands gives a title in his list of Baillie's minor writings, but without listing any source. The article is entitled "Christianity and the Ideals of the West" by John Baillie, printed in the American journal *Christianity and Crisis* edited by his great friend and former Union Colleague, Reinhold Niebuhr [essentially the US counterpart to *The Christian Newsletter*] Vol 1, No 24 dated Jan 12, 1942. The entire volume 1941-44 is a bound collection of John Baillie's own copies of the bi-weekly journal, each copy carrying his typed address at Whitehouse Terrace and still bearing their wartime New York one and a half cent stamps.

⁹ Hereafter known as The Baillie Commission or as CIGWPC.

¹⁰ Other officers included Matthew Stewart, Vice-Convenor who was in 1942 Convenor of the Church and Nation Committee; J. Hutchison Cockburn Vice-Convenor (1944), E.J. Hagan Secretary. The Leader of the Iona Community G.F. MacLeod was convenor of the Industrial Relations working group. Alex Kydd of the Foreign Missions department was a member.

work. A 1942 article in *Christianity and Crisis*, “Christianity and the Ideals of the West” along with a 1943 essay in *Christian Century*, *The Theology of The War*¹¹ and Baillie’s Closing Moderatorial Address to the 1943 General Assembly, *The Prospects of Spiritual Renewal*¹² offer an insight into his views while the Commission was sitting. These writings may be set alongside his Riddell lectures delivered in 1945 at the University of Durham, in the closing months of the war and published the same year as *What is Christian Civilization?*.¹³

These writings, in particular the two volumes of public lectures which effectively “bookend” the reports of the Baillie Commission and respond to many of the same themes – offer the best opportunity to consider how far Baillie’s own position and influence are reflected in the reports.

The Background to the Baillie Commission

Ecclesiology is central to the reports of the Baillie Commission. Their key statement on ecclesiology was made in the opening section of the 1943 report to the General Assembly, dealing with “The Church of Christ – Its True Nature and Its Universal Mission”. The Commission’s reflections and John Baillie’s introduction of them as Moderator, were offered on the 100th anniversary of the Disruption, in the wake of a century of turbulent debate about ecclesiology within Scotland, which had given rise in the 19th century to three competing Presbyterian institutions, each believing themselves to be the true heirs of the Scottish reformation.

The twentieth century was to be the century of reunion. In 1900, one major breach was healed, when the majority of congregations in the United Presbyterian and Free Churches combined to form the United Free Church in “a difficult union..

¹¹ *Christian Century* 60, 1943, pp354-6: Baillie 1943a.

¹² Baillie 1943b

¹³ A Second and revised edition followed in 1947

triumphantly achieved”.¹⁴ Almost immediately, preparations began to address the remaining major division, with serious negotiations beginning in 1909.

The following year, Scotland witnessed a remarkable vision of the future of ecclesiology when the global expansion of Christianity, fuelled by the Western missions of the 18th and 19th centuries, was reflected back to the Church in Scotland through the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. John Baillie, then aged 24 and a student at New College, was a steward at the Edinburgh Conference, alongside William Temple, under the organisational oversight of conference Secretary J.H. Oldham. Edinburgh 1910 gave Scotland (and Baillie) an unprecedented glimpse of the church catholic and a compelling vision of the potential for the church’s mission in the still young (and comparatively innocent) twentieth century.

The catholic vision of Edinburgh 1910 was soon to be eclipsed by the catholic carnage of the First World War. John Baillie witnessed both at close quarters. His doctoral studies at New College were cut short by the war¹⁵ and he spent much of the years between 1914 and 1918 in France with the YMCA.¹⁶ In 1919, on the recommendation of his teacher, New College Professor H.R. Mackintosh, he was offered an appointment as Chair of Christian Theology at Auburn Seminary, New York, a post he held until 1927, when he moved to the chair of Systematic Theology at Emmanuel College Toronto. In 1930, he returned to New York to become Roosevelt Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Seminary, the post he held until he returned to Scotland in 1934 to become Professor of Divinity at New College, now a college of the (reunited) Church of Scotland.

¹⁴ Henderson 1951, 116

¹⁵ His doctoral thesis on Kant was never completed.

¹⁶ There ‘with’ Baillie were, among millions of others, George MacLeod, R.H. Tawney, A.D. Lindsay, John MacMurray – a generation of men whose experience of war shaped their work as scholars and disciples profoundly.

The Church in Scotland that John Baillie had left in 1919 was very different to the one he returned to in 1934. By way of background to the work of the Baillie Commission, I want to consider five aspects of that change:

1. Presbyterian Reunion

John Baillie left Scotland as a minister of the United Free Church and returned as a minister of the Church of Scotland. In the post-war reconstruction of Scottish society, a further reunion of Scotland's divided Presbyterians became inevitable. The impetus for reunion was fuelled by a mix of rising indifference to the previous causes of division, a desire for united witness in the face of the divisions and devastations of war, an increasing concern about the competition offered by non-Presbyterian churches and a sense of threat in relation to the state's decision to fund Roman Catholic schools. By 1919, a new set of *Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual* had been agreed and by 1921, they were enshrined in law by the Westminster Parliament in the *Church of Scotland Act*. They came into effect in the Church of Scotland in 1926, paving the way for formal union in 1929.¹⁷

The end result of the century long struggle between the largest Reformed churches and the state was a remarkable settlement, not least in the way that the UK state formally enacted legislation which limited its own jurisdiction. The Articles Declaratory assert what Francis Lyall calls "the co-ordinate jurisdiction of Church and of State, each supreme within its own sphere", while leaving "the actual

¹⁷ There are 9 Articles in all, offering a succinct statement of the polity and confessional position of the Church of Scotland. Article III declares the Church to be 'in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland reformed in 1560, whose liberties were ratified in 1592, and for whose security provision was made in the Treaty of Union of 1707' and also famously describes it as 'a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people'. Articles IV to VI contain the key statements of the relationship between Church and State which formed the basis for the 1929 re-union with the United Free Church, in particular the independent jurisdiction of the Church under God in matters spiritual and the mutual duties owed to one another by Church and State acting within their respective spheres. See the work of the late Douglas Murray for a detailed historical account of the origins of the Articles Declaratory (including the full text of the articles) in his book *Freedom to Reform*, Murray 1993

determination of that sphere to each". He notes drily that this provision for future determination of the settlement means "there is therefore room for conflict here".¹⁸

The Articles reflected the mainstream of Reformed theological tradition in their division of Scotland into two spheres – the spiritual and the civil. In one the church was to be supreme, in the other the state. The supremacy of the state was tempered by the church reminding it both of its divine appointment and of the calling of the nation "acting in its corporate capacity". The new united Church of Scotland was given a privileged recognition by the State as "a national church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people". The settlement received wide, even hyperbolic acclaim from many quarters.¹⁹

2. 'Sectarian' Public Theology

Two difficult unions had been 'triumphantly achieved' - but triumphant narratives from this period of the political consolidation of Scottish Presbyterianism concealed deeply troubling developments in the ethical and political witness of the churches concerned. The post-war years saw traumatic economic instability, the failure of capital markets and the rise of mass unemployment. The post-war extension of the electoral franchise failed to contain the increased social expectations of the masses of Scots who had endured the privations of war only to return to continued poverty and inequality, appalling housing conditions and inadequate health care. The consequence was widespread industrial unrest as new voices spread the gospel of socialism and communism to working people in Scotland.

¹⁸ Lyall, 1980, 71

¹⁹ "The breadth, completeness and uncompromising character of this Declaration make it one of the most remarkable expositions in modern times of the meaning of spiritual independence." was the verdict of the Church of England's Archbishops' Committee on Church and State in 192?; Tory politician Hugh Cecil claimed the Act "harmonises with a definiteness and completeness, for which I think no parallel in Christian history is to be found, the National Recognition of Religion with the Spiritual Freedom of the Church."

Few recent commentators have anything positive to say about the Church of Scotland's 'public' theology in the 1920s and early 1930s. Historian Ian Machin observes that:

The Churches' social message often appeared bland and ephemeral at a time, especially in the first four decades of the 20th century, when the concept of class was especially prominent and rival social doctrines were very much to the fore.²⁰

He suggests that the main tendency among Christians regarding the question of social change was to keep to the general, the moderate and the non-partisan in their expressions, quoting a 1921 *Life and Work* comment that 'There is nothing in the Church's Gospel which enables here to settle vexed questions of wages and hours of labour and systems of production.. she is the Church of no party and no class.'²¹

Donald Smith's verdict is also thoroughly negative:

Whereas in the last century the Church, for the most part, believed it had not the right to comment upon or criticise existing social, political and economic structures and practices in the light of the gospel, in the late 1920s and 1930s it found itself largely silent because it could find no relevant Christian insight to offer in the face of the complex economic crisis of the time.

It would take some sober reflection on the meaning of the economic crisis and the onset of yet another war before a more realistic theology and more relevant social teaching would take shape in the Scottish Church.²²

It is misleading, however, to suggest that in this period, the social message of the largest Scottish churches was always bland, or that voices were not raised to diagnose the source of Scotland's social and economic ills. Witness the authoritative narrative of this period developed in recent decades by church historian Stewart J. Brown. He notes that the union of 1929 promised a new era in Church-State relations in Scotland:

²⁰ Machin, 1998, 6

²¹ Machin, 1998, 25 – *Life and Work* is the denominational magazine of the Church of Scotland.

²² Smith, 1989, 371

The British State and the Scottish national Church many believed, would now co-operate for the elevation of the material and spiritual life of the Scottish people; they would work together to establish the Christian commonwealth in Scotland...during the decade between 1929 and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Church committed itself to fulfilling the hopes raised by the Union for national religion in Scotland. The Church's social policy was dominated by the attempt to achieve the ideal of a Christian society in the midst of the economic stagnation and social hardships resulting from the world depression.²³

Brown argues (indeed over-argues) that Dr John White, minister of the Barony, had become "*the leader*"²⁴ of the Church of Scotland during the 1930s", achieving 'an almost Chalmers-like status'.²⁵ He goes on to trace the way this paternalistic 'high Tory, Freemason and British nationalist' steered the Kirk's public theology onto a racist and sectarian course, marked by a shameful deployment of toxic anti-Catholic and anti-Irish rhetoric from him and other senior figures in the Church of Scotland.²⁶ White had chaired the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation committee during the 1920s and ensured that this committee had 'pursued the campaign with vigour'. In 1929 he wrote to the Glasgow Herald arguing that Irish immigration must be restricted in order to preserve racial purity in Scotland and to 'crystallise national life from native elements'. As the first post-Union Moderator, he asserted that the campaign against the Roman menace must be a priority for the united Church. He was succeeded as Convenor of Church and Nation by J Hutchinson Cockburn, who continued the campaign, calling in 1931 for Scottish employers to discriminate against non-Scots. The 1931 Assembly also set up the Church Interests Committee, which was to work among other things for the abolition of the 1918 Education Act, which provided State assistance to Roman Catholic schools.

According to Stewart Brown:

²³ Stewart J. Brown *The Social Ideal of the Church of Scotland During The 1930s* in Morton ed. 1994

²⁴ the singular here is an unhelpful exaggeration of Brown's point

²⁵ The uncritical promotion of White's reputation can be seen in the hagiographic treatment he receives from his biographer, Augustus Muir, Muir 1958

²⁶ Morton ed. 1994, 20-22

The Church opposed the Scoto-Irish Catholics because they were allegedly of a different race and the national Church was putting itself forward as the champion of the Scottish race. Further, the Church viewed the Scoto-Irish Catholics as a direct challenge to the Church's ideal of national religion and the Christian commonwealth - ...As they would not participate in the combined national and religious revival for which the Church was working, they would have to be either deported or ghettoised.²⁷

Brown's narrative leads us into still more troubled waters as he alleges that the overtly racist campaign against the Scoto-Irish Catholic minority 'may have contributed to the muted response in the Church of Scotland to the emergence of the National Socialist dictatorship in Germany and the Nazi reorganisation of the German Protestant Church. Brown cites a letter to Life & Work from Paisley minister David McQueen in April 1934, claiming that the Nazi-sponsored Church union was modelled directly on the Scottish Church Union of 1929.

McQueen was not alone as an apologist for the Nazis in the 1930s Church of Scotland, New College Professor W.P. Paterson played his part in the 1935 assembly. It is instructive to compare his view of the Nazis as a check on atheistic communism and his claim that matters were "not so black as they were painted" with the insistence of Nansie Blackie that in the 1930s "a general knowledge of the facts [about the persecution of the Jews] was readily available through the BBC, the Manchester *Guardian* and the presence of numerous refugees in Britain and America, most obviously in universities"²⁸.

It is from the mid 1930s Brown suggests, that the mood within the Church of Scotland begins to change and White's influence begins to wane (although it is apparently still strong in 1938 when Ron Ferguson tells us that George MacLeod's master-stroke in negotiations with the Iona Cathedral Trustees was to persuade "the Kirk's father-figure, the Very Rev. Dr John White" to be a sponsor of his project).²⁹

²⁷ *ibid.* 22

²⁸ Blackie, 1995, 61

²⁹ Ferguson, 1990, 150

Brown's retelling of the decades before and after the glorious Union appears to have already become canonical, given a high profile in the work of Callum Brown³⁰, Will Storrar³¹, and Christopher Harvie³². Itself a necessary correction to an older more triumphalistic narrative, it will in future need to be supplemented by a fuller account of those who dissented from this reactionary line of thought.

3. Ecumenical Advance

Brown traces the mood change from the mid 1930s to the growing influence of a group of younger Church of Scotland ministers, oriented less to White's conception of Scottish national religion and more to the ecumenical movement.

This introduces us to another set of theological, ethical and political sources apart from which the achievement of the Baillie Commission is inconceivable and without which Stewart J. Brown's analysis is too one-sided. The 1910 Edinburgh conference, while predated by a number of significant ecumenical initiatives and institutions, was the catalyst for a new era of ecumenical activism. The first Scottish Council of Churches was created in 1924 on the base of the Scottish Missionary Campaign Continuation Committee from the 1910 conference. While the leading denominations in Scotland were absorbed in the task of negotiating union, organisations like the YMCA and the SCM (Student Christian Movement) along with its international family in the World Student Christian Federation³³ were growing rapidly and schooling a new generation of Scottish Christian leadership in ecumenical theology, internationalism and progressive approaches to social welfare. The relative weakness and invisibility of both organisations in Scotland today, contrasts with the enormous influence they exerted in the Scotland of the

³⁰ 'In the context of the economic slump of the 1920s and 1930s, a new generation of right-wing conservative clergy took control in both the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, leading the churches towards reunion on a new agenda of social conservatism, anti-labourism and racism.' Callum G. Brown, 1997, 140

³¹ in Morton ed.1994 CTPI 31

³² Harvie 1999, 146 - After an inter-war career distinguished by intolerance and indifference to social issues, the Kirk rapidly came abreast of Keynesian economics and the welfare state

³³ founded in 1895

20s and 30s, an example of which is the remarkable statistic that out of 72,000 university students in the UK in 1935, 11,500 of them were signed up members of the SCM.³⁴

Among the most influential people within the Scottish churches: ministers, academics and active lay people, there was therefore a large group of university educated women and men, of whom perhaps half had likely been members of the SCM. The SCM had helped to create an ecumenical elite in Scotland. It had nurtured a commitment to ecumenism which was rooted in the lived experience of the Movement at a local, national and international level (through the WSCF). It had brought people to faith and had contributed to their formation as disciples within a radicalised and politicised vision of Christianity. Ian M Fraser, whose work is discussed in the next chapter, describes undergoing a “kingdom conversion” through the SCM at Edinburgh University in 1936.³⁵

The ongoing activism of dispersed networks such as the SCM, serviced in the 1930s by gifted staff including Robert Mackie and Lesslie Newbigin, was complemented by influential annual (Swanwick) and quadrennial conferences, at which many of the leading churchmen and women of the day, British and international, were speakers.

The SCM Quadrennial for 1933 was held in Edinburgh, bringing together 2000 students from 50 nations, and ‘was dominated by the crisis within old Christendom’. Lesslie Newbigin describes J.H. Oldham delivering a ‘profound and

³⁴ Blackie, 1995, 52; she also comments: “Several factors combined to give much greater importance to a strong student-led Christian organisation within the field of higher education than can be easily appreciated in the 1990s. These include the significant place of both church and university in British society and the largely accepted concept of an elite student class... Thus for the inter-war period in Britain, what the SCM thought today the churches often thought tomorrow, as in the natural progression of things, SCM staff.. moved on to become Bishops, Board Conveners and executives of missionary societies”. *ibid.* 17; the records of John Baillie’s speaking engagements in the years after 1934 show him to have been a regular speaker at SCM groups and conferences, see Newlands 2002, pp321ff; Intriguingly William Still, the prominent post-war Conservative Evangelical minister was briefly a member of the SCM in this period! see details in his 1991 autobiography *Dying to Live*, Christian Focus Publications.

³⁵ Interview with the author. July 2004

prophetic address' at this, in which he spoke of the radical anti-Christian turn of the European enlightenment.³⁶

On a more formal level, the international ecumenical movement had also been advanced by the headline conferences in Stockholm 1925 (Life and Work), Lausanne 1927 (Faith and Order) and Jerusalem 1928 (IMC) and Tambaram 1938 (IMC).³⁷ William Temple and J.H. Oldham had emerged as key ecumenical leaders within the UK,³⁸ whose vision of ecumenical theology was insistent about the key ethical and political role to which the church was called. This vision received its fullest articulation in the work of the 1937 Life & Work Oxford Conference on Church, State and Society in which Baillie was a senior and influential participant.³⁹

4. *The Barthian Turn*

David Fergusson notes the “change in theological fashions during John Baillie’s lifetime, particularly between the two World Wars” which he had to negotiate and respond to.⁴⁰ Chief among those changes was the rise of a new movement of dialectical or neo-orthodox theologians, the most influential of these being Karl Barth. Alec Cheyne characterises John Baillie’s response to Barth⁴¹ as falling “among those whose entire outlook was affected, but who in the end withheld their whole hearted approval”.⁴² He argues that Baillie sought a mediating position between ‘conservative biblicism’ and ‘liberal modernism’, sensing that the time of

³⁶ Newbiggin, 1993, 25; see also Clement 1999, 279 Who highlights Oldham’s use of the work of Swiss philosopher and educator Eberhard Grisebach in this presentation.

³⁷ Commission Members Alex Kydd and George MacLeod were Church of Scotland delegates at the 1938 IMC Conference in Tambaram.

³⁸ John and Donald Baillie were both actively involved; John in Life and Work and Donald in Faith and Order

³⁹ It was highly significant that three of the members of the Baillie Commission had also been among the eight representatives of the Church of Scotland at the 1937 Oxford Conference. Its Convenor John Baillie and its vice-Convenor J. Hutchison Cockburn as well as Rev. Alex S. Kydd (Church of Scotland Director of Foreign Missions), had taken part in the working groups of the Oxford Conference on ‘Church and Community’ (Hutchison-Cockburn), Church and State (Kydd) and Economic Order (Baillie). In a Harvard Lecture delivered during his 1941-42 Moderatorial Year, Hutchison Cockburn commented that “the Conference had been so adequately prepared that.. even now after five years, the findings of the Oxford Conference in its various commissions still form a basis for future thinking and action by the churches”. p196, “Christian Proposals For A Better World” pp195-206 in *Christendom*, Vol VIII, Spring 1943, No 2

⁴⁰ Fergusson ed. 1993, 123

⁴¹ Cheyne offers a shrewd four-fold typology of responses to Barth

⁴² Fergusson ed. 1993, 32

the “ebullient pre-War liberalism of New College” was coming to an end towards the end of the 1920s and that Barth’s 1918 *Epistle to the Romans* marked the turning point.⁴³

Barth’s influence on theology in Scotland in the 1920s owed much to the interest in and advocacy of his work by New College Professor H.R. Mackintosh, John Baillie’s prime theological mentor in Scotland.⁴⁴ The growing impact of Barth’s theology on John (and Donald) Baillie in the late 1920s and early 1930s is charted in George Newlands’ ‘theological biography’ of the two brothers.⁴⁵ David Fergusson offers the best account of John Baillie’s overall theological development in his essay on him as “orthodox liberal”.⁴⁶

Baillie’s contributions to J.H. Oldham’s wartime thinktank, the Moot, throughout 1941 and 1942 contain regular references to Barth’s ideas, both critical and supportive.⁴⁷ In “Christianity and the Ideals of the West” Baillie responds warmly but critically to Barth’s *Letter to British Christians*. In *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Barth and the theologians of the Confessing Church are allowed an extreme response to an extreme situation, but Baillie is clearly worried about potentially separatist tendencies in their ecclesiology. This worry surfaces again in the 1946 appendix to *What is Christian Civilization?*, where Baillie disputes Barth’s critical position on paedobaptism, relating it to his rejection of the idea of Christendom.⁴⁸

5. *The Rise of New Christian Social Thought*

In his contribution to the 1994 colloquium on the Baillie Commission, Adrian Hastings describes four phases in “the relationship of the churches and the political and social community” in Britain.⁴⁹ However, his account of the first phase (1880-1914) and its transition into the second (1930s–1950s) is uneven and even

⁴³ Fergusson ed. 1993, 34

⁴⁴ Roberts 1991, 98 – Mackintosh recommended Baillie for the Auburn post in 1919 and the New College post in 1934.

⁴⁵ eg Newlands 2002, 144, 147, 151

⁴⁶ Fergusson ed. 1993 chapter 6

⁴⁷ Minutes of The Moot for 1941 and 1942, Baillie Archive, University Of Edinburgh

⁴⁸ Later Baillie would speak of Barth’s medicine being “administered in merciless overdoses”!

⁴⁹ Morton ed. 1994, 4

eccentric in what he mentions and what he ignores. There is no mention of Scotland until Baillie and no mention at all of the ILP or the Labour Party.

There are clearly major Scottish traditions of radical thinking and activism in this era: the formation of the ILP, the election of the first socialist MPs and the rise of Red Clydeside to mention just a few themes. At a more rarefied level, the influence of 'Scottish Idealists' Edward Caird and Henry Jones fed a pre-war radical intellectual tradition with strong theological as well as philosophical currents. In a very different key, the American Social Gospel thinkers such as Rauschenbusch had made their mark on theological circles and their legacy was still active in the decades after the First World War.

The 1920s too deserve more attention. There is an Oxford Generation which includes as contemporaries William Temple, R.H. Tawney and A.D. Lindsay – figures who made striking contributions from the 1920s onwards. Here we find R.H. Tawney producing within a single decade *The Acquisitive Society* (1921), *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) and *Equality* (1931). A.D. Lindsay held a chair in Moral Philosophy at Glasgow from 1922-24 and his DNB entry tells us that “during his Glasgow professorship he lectured to the Clydesiders and helped to set up a joint committee of the university and labour along the lines of the Oxford tutorial classes committee; he was also a founder of the Scottish Institute of Adult Education.”⁵⁰

William Temple, at this point a remarkably young Bishop of Manchester, chaired the Birmingham COPEC⁵¹ conference in 1924. Out of the COPEC process came the Christian Research Council to which V.A. Demant was appointed as director in 1929. In the next two years Demant produced three reports for the Council, *The Miners Distress and the Coal Problem* (1929), *The Just Price* (1930), and *This Unemployment: Disaster or Opportunity?* (1931).

⁵⁰ DNB Online - [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34537>, accessed 22 Feb 2005]; Baillie was reading A.D. Lindsay in 1928 and heard him lecture in New York on Christianity and Economics in 1932 – source: diary entries cited in Newlands 2002, 332, 337

⁵¹ COPEC stands for Conference on Christian Political and Economic Citizenship

Through this whole period, we also find the remarkable figure of missionary scholar and ecumenical activist J.H. Oldham, at work within the SCM, the IMC and virtually every other ecumenical, missional and inter-church forum. While Oldham is a man of many parts, he is significant as a disseminator of Christian social thought from within the IMC in the 1920s and also as a thinker in his own right, particularly in the 1920s through his *Christianity and the Race Problem* (1924).

Although Hastings is right to point out the remarkable productivity of the 1930s in relation to Christian social thought, we miss out a significant part of the story of 'public' theology in the United Kingdom if we pass over the ferment of the 1920s and the key texts which emerged from it.

John Baillie's Pilgrimage

Having set out in broad brush the pre-war background to the Baillie Commission I now turn to a more detailed consideration of John Baillie's 'pilgrimage' in the years following his return to Scotland.

In his 1993 essay on John Baillie, David Fergusson claims that "an interest in the social and political nature of faith is only a distinctive feature of Baillie's theology after 1940". He suggests that "an important influence in this respect may have been Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures delivered in Edinburgh in 1939 during the outbreak of war".⁵² While Niebuhr was clearly a key conversation partner, his long-standing friendship and continuous communication with Baillie from the 1920s onward, makes it unlikely that the Giffords should be singled out as particularly influential in this respect.

If we can identify a 'politicisation' of John Baillie's theology and I think we can, it was not a response to a single event, like Niebuhr's Giffords. It was a process

⁵² Fergusson ed. 1993, p147

which Baillie underwent, in common with many others, in response to the deepening international political crisis of the 1930s. What was distinctive, if not unique, was the form this process took in Baillie's intellectual pilgrimage and the substantial influence it exerted on a church commission whose reports remain the outstanding examples of Scottish 'public' theology in the past century.

In what follows, I want to offer a fuller account of that politicisation than has yet appeared in the secondary literature and to argue that Baillie's influence within the commission, was crucial in fashioning a significant political theology and 'theological politics' within its reports.

Duncan Forrester is right to relate John Baillie's 'politicisation' to the Oxford 1937 conference, but gives little detail of what this involved.⁵³ Two key factors missing from these accounts of Baillie's development as a 'social' theologian, which push back the dating of his interest in social and political questions still further, are the impact of the German church struggle and his own key role in the process of preparing for Oxford 1937. If we have to fix on a particular date, 1934 suggests itself and Nils Ehrenstrom's historical narrative in Rouse & Neill's *History of the Ecumenical Movement* becomes a key source, alongside Keith Clements' outstanding biography of J.H. Oldham.⁵⁴

In 1934, J.H. Oldham made a strategic switch from his work with the IMC to work with the Life & Work movement, a group he had previously not rated highly.⁵⁵ In April 1934 Life & Work held a conference on Church and State in Paris which Oldham attended and which convinced him in view of the disturbing events unfolding in Germany that this was a theme of overriding importance for the churches to engage with. John Baillie's diary entry for 20 April 1934 describes a meeting in New York of the 'Oldham Group' including Niebuhr, Van Dusen, Tillich,

⁵³ Fergusson ed. 1993, 222

⁵⁴ Rouse & Neill 1967; Clements 1999

⁵⁵ Clements 1999

Ulich, Mackintosh, Mackay and Marshall Stewart.⁵⁶ By the end of May the Barmen synod had met and their Declaration had been made in terms which reverberated around the theological world. In August, the Council for Life & Work met on the Danish island of Fano. Baillie who had only just returned to Scotland was not present. Nils Ehrenstrom, a Life & Work staff member in 1934 claims that:

The biennial meeting of the Council at Fano, Denmark, during the last week of August 1934, stands out as perhaps the most critical and decisive meeting in its history. Here the Council solemnly resolved to throw its weight on the side of the Confessing Church in Germany against the so-called “German Christians” and by implication against the Nazi regime.⁵⁷

This stand led to a formal protest being read out at the meeting by a representative of the Nazi Reichsbischof. Events in Germany strengthened the Council’s conviction that issues of ‘Church, Community and State’ should be the focus of its next major conference, which would be delayed until 1937 to allow more time for preparation. The Council minutes from Fano reflect the intensity of the concerns:

In the interrelation of these social realities [Church, Community and State] “is focused the great and critical debate between the Christian faith and the secular tendencies of our time. In this struggle, the very existence of the Christian Church is at stake.”⁵⁸

Ehrenstrom then tells us that “the Council instructed its Research department to devote itself entirely to these preparations [for Oxford] and strengthened its Advisory Commission on Research. Among its new members were – John Baillie, Emil Brunner, V.A. Demant, Leonard Hodgson, Wilhelm Menn, W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, and H.P. Van Dusen.”⁵⁹ Here we see that in 1934, deeply concerned about the situation in Germany, at the same time as moving back to Scotland, Baillie moved into a key position at the heart of debates within academic theology about Christian responses within the social and political sphere. Oldham was appointed Chairman

⁵⁶ Newlands 2002, 1934 – not clear whether this group was linked to the IMC, WSCF or to Life & Work – Diary for 16 Jan 1935 describes a meeting (now back in Edinburgh) of the “Oldham Group of Life & Work” two days later Baillie read A.D. Lindsay’s *The Churches and Democracy*

⁵⁷ Rouse & Neill 1967, 583; Dietrich Bonhoeffer attended the Council as a Youth Secretary of the World Alliance Rouse & Neill 1967, 282 and preached the sermon at Council worship

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.* 584

of the Commission, with effective day to day control over Oxford preparations and remained so until 1938.

None of this is to suggest that Baillie was apolitical before this point. He was a superbly educated, socially rounded, Christian intellectual with a due concern for his responsibilities as a citizen.⁶⁰ The programme at Union in the 1920s had included annual conferences on 'Church Work in City and Industry' addressing urban, industrial and 'racial' concerns.⁶¹ George Newlands writes of his return to Scotland in 1934 at the age of 48, that "he was not without a sense of his own authority"⁶². Clearly positioned in Stewart Brown's account of the Church of Scotland in the 1930s as 'the prince across the water' in relation to John White⁶³, Newlands says of his taking up the chair at New College, that "John had come into his kingdom". If the years in America had brought authority, the events in Germany brought prophetic responsibility. As a Church theologian, Baillie set to work to produce a theological response. The decisions made by the Life and Work council in 1934 offered a way to develop that response with characteristic intellectual thoroughness.

Clements says that by the time of Fano, Oldham was already equivocal about the value of large conferences so that "with Oxford, it was certainly the study programme rather than the gathering itself which most excited him".⁶⁴ The preparations were immensely thorough and detailed, with Oldham orchestrating unprecedented levels of transatlantic collaboration between theologians, church leaders and Christian academics from a range of disciplines. Clements comments that:

It is arguably the case that in its preparation and execution Oxford 1937 – at least as far as thinking about church and society is concerned – generated a culture of shared language,

⁶⁰ Which of course, he had not been in the USA!

⁶¹ Newlands 2002, 86

⁶² Newlands 2002, 195

⁶³ this is my phrase not Brown's

⁶⁴ Clements 1999, 315

values and methods which remained normative for the ecumenical movement until about the fourth assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala in 1968, over thirty years later.⁶⁵

The evidence therefore points to a deliberate decision on the part of John Baillie, within the context of the ecumenical response to the rise of fascism and the situation of the German churches, to intensify his own intellectual engagement with social and political concerns from 1934 onwards. Baillie was involved in various expressions of the peace movement within the Scottish churches from 1935, speaking at meetings and rallies and travelling to Germany twice on church deputations in 1935 and 1936. He was visited in Edinburgh by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had also attended the Fano conference, in 1935. In the same year he wrote an article on “Christianity and the Totalitarian Claims of the Modern State”⁶⁶.

Duncan Forrester’s comment that Baillie was already by 1937 “a prominent and respected member of an influential, international and ecumenical network of people concerned with church and society issues” is therefore fully justified.⁶⁷

It also seems likely that there was a further significant development in Baillie’s thinking during this preparatory period, although the evidence is more circumstantial. Baillie’s breadth of reading in the humanities could be seen to lead more naturally into questions of political theory and the role of the state. and before 1937 there is little mention of his involvement with the economic questions which were to figure prominently and controversially in the Baillie Commission report. The indication that Baillie could have been a crucial figure here also, comes from the fact that at Oxford 1937⁶⁸, Baillie worked in the section of the Conference

⁶⁵ Clements 1999, 308; c.f. R.H Preston’s judgment that: “The 1937 Oxford Conference... had a substantial theological input of a quality never since bettered and perhaps not equalled.” Preston 1983, 82

⁶⁶ Newlands 2002, 201

⁶⁷ Fergusson ed. 1993, 222;

⁶⁸ A major work on the Oxford Conference has now been published by Dr Graeme Smith, who adopts a highly critical (and highly debatable) reading of what he calls its ‘anti-modernist’ tone and its ‘totalitarian’ theological approach. He is particularly hostile and I believe, markedly unfair, to Oldham. Keith Clement’s biography of Oldham compares favourably with Smith’s treatment, particularly as Clement had preferential access to the Oldham archives.

considering questions of ‘Economic Order’ along with R.H. Tawney, V.A. Demant, John MacMurray, T.S. Eliot, Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr.⁶⁹ Given the intensive process of preparation, drafting and redrafting initial position papers, along with Oldham’s careful monitoring about who went into each section, it seems likely both that Baillie wanted to work in this section and that he was involved in the period from 1935-37 in preparing for it. The presence of a figure like Eliot, also far from being an economist, suggests the intense interest in economic questions at this point among thinkers for whom it was not their natural provenance.

Writing in the conference report *The Churches Survey Their Task*, J.H. Oldham says of the preparatory work 1934-37, “It is hardly possible to overestimate the educative value of this oecumenical interchange of thought for those who participated in it.”⁷⁰ Duncan Forrester judges that the preparatory documents, particularly W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft and J.H. Oldham’s *The Church and Its Function In Society* (1937) “shaped [Baillie’s] thinking about society decisively” and that the Oxford Conference “influenced him profoundly”.⁷¹

The first sign of this influence comes in a letter John Baillie wrote to *The Times* (published on 7 August 1937) in response to that paper’s hostile editorial comment about the message of the Oxford Conference. In the letter he accuses the leader of making ‘facile’ distinctions between religious and political questions, defends the right and duty of the church to develop its thinking on such questions and offers a specific defence of the work of the Economic Section emphasising that its conclusions were adopted “unanimously” and “enthusiastically”.⁷²

However, the clearest testimony comes in the manuscript of Baillie’s 1938 lecture to the SCM theological conference at Swanwick. Here he tells the students:

⁶⁹ Oldham ed. 1937

⁷⁰ Oldham ed. 1937, 15

⁷¹ Fergusson ed. 1993, 222

⁷² John Baillie’s letter to *The Times*, Aug 07, 1937 via *Times Digital Archive*.

The problem of the relation of the Church to other forms of society will always be found in the end to lead us back to the more ultimate problem of the relation of religion to the rest of human life – the relation of the sacred to the secular or of Sunday to weekday. At the Oxford conference.. both problems were constantly before us. During that conference and during the period of preparation for it I was myself drawn into more hard thinking concerning this problem than at any previous time or times. I came away from the conference with a greater awareness than ever of the complexity of the problem and of the confused and divided state of the Christian mind concerning it. But I came away feeling also that I had learned something very valuable about the presuppositions of a true solution.⁷³

The other key factor to note here is the decisive moves made by the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences of 1937 towards the formation of a World Council of Churches. John Baillie was wholly supportive of these moves and became a leading advocate for the provisional WCC within Scotland.

In 1937, the beginning of The Moot, an interdisciplinary (and interfaith) gathering of British and émigré thinkers convened by J.H. Oldham, extended this process of intellectual networking beyond the Oxford conference and Baillie's frequent attendance under difficult conditions was an indication of its value for him.⁷⁴

John Baillie's Ecclesiology

While his commitment to the Church and its life had never waned and he would have lectured on the doctrine of the Church within the theological curriculum in the USA, Canada and Scotland, prior to 1937 John Baillie had written little about the Church. After 1937 this was to change. Invited to address the SCM theological conference at Swanwick in January 1938, his theme was "What is the Church?"⁷⁵ While the title suggests a classic dogmatic approach to ecclesiology, what is intriguing about this address is that Baillie does not take such an approach. In fact, he does not even attempt a standard dogmatic answer to his topic. Instead, the lecture is preoccupied with questions of the church's relation to the state and to

⁷³ *What Is The Church?* TS in Baillie Archives BAI-02-29

⁷⁴ For accounts of The Moot and Baillie's role in it see Keith Clements chapters in Fergusson ed. 1993 and Morton ed. 1994 as well as relevant sections in Clements 1999.

⁷⁵ Newlands 2002, 208

society and the church's approach to involvement in political questions. He begins not from scripture or tradition, but by suggesting:

To know what the Church is, is at the same time to know how it is related to the life of the community as a whole, to the State, to the nation, to the schools and universities, to the chambers of commerce and the trades-unions.⁷⁶

Remarkably, he claims that “all these questions are at bottom the same question” and together they form a “sociological” and (because man is inherently social) “anthropological” problem “of almost unmatched delicacy and complexity”.⁷⁷ In a passage which is substantially repeated in the Baillie Commission reports, he testifies that at Oxford “we all learned afresh” that “the problem of the Church” cannot be solved in the light of a general sociological theory. Rather, the sociologist would do better to begin with the church and seek to understand other corporate entities in the light of “what the church is”.⁷⁸

In a following paragraph, whose arguments are repeated in his contributions to Moot discussions and will appear in print in *Invitation to Pilgrimage* as well as in the text of the Commission reports, he quotes from his colleague J.H.S. Burleigh's *The Church – What is It?* to argue for the crucial significance of the prophetic tradition in ancient Israel in breaking the link between ‘church’ and ‘nation’, by imagining the ‘faithful remnant’ as ‘a new kind of religious community’ and one which is potentially universal.⁷⁹ His argument proceeds in dialogue with Reinhold Niebuhr,⁸⁰ Ernst Troeltsch⁸¹ and Augustine, but throughout his concern is with the relation of sacred and secular, the heavenly and the earthly cities, the church and the state. It is the argument of someone still intensely preoccupied with the agenda of Oxford and so much so, that a major dogmatic *locus* is addressed entirely in terms of that

⁷⁶ *What Is The Church?* TS in Baillie Archives BAI-02-29, p1

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ quotation from p4 of Burleigh's text; strangely, Burleigh is not credited in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, where Baillie presents the argument in identical terms.

⁸⁰ he quotes Niebuhr's 1937 Burge Lecture: “Do the State and Nation belong to God or the devil?”

⁸¹ *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Vol 1

agenda. Here we see John Baillie, responding to the theological context of the late 1930s by re-interrogating his own readings of Western history in search of what we can only call a 'political ecclesiology' – an understanding of the church as *corpus* and as *polis* in relation to the other bodies which those terms denote. No-one at Oxford wanted a return to theocracy, he tells his audience, neither the Christian Communists nor the Social Gospellers, but many dreamed of what Tillich calls a "theonomy, that is an autonomy [for the State and non ecclesial spheres of life] filled with religion".⁸² But how is this to be achieved? How can a divine centre for all things be reconciled with a relative autonomy for human society? Here Baillie suggests a division between moral and technical aspects of political decisions – as what properly belongs to God and to Caesar respectively. Christianity must be involved in politics, but must not identify completely with any one party or programme. He tries out an example:

It seems clear for example as I heard it remarked the other day, that the question of whether next year's income tax rate should be 4/9 or 5/ - is a question that belongs only to Caesar; and yet in the Rearmament policy that lies immediately behind this technical question there are obviously issues that belong to God.⁸³

This leads him on to "perhaps the most difficult complication of all" – how to relate the Absolute and Interim Will of God. He argues with Niebuhr, that the Sermon on the Mount, which reflects the Absolute Will of God is invaluable but impracticable, citing Dibelius' characterisation of it as "an eschatological stimulus" and Niebuhr's conception of "The Relevance of an Impossible Ethical Ideal".⁸⁴ The question permeating all the Oxford discussions was "whether Christianity is a social gospel". Baillie's ending is seminal – "up to the present I have not been forced to choose and have occupied middle ground. My position is as follows. In the last resort Christianity is a social gospel or nothing at all." Why the choice and declaration now? Goebbels' New Year broadcast at the close of 1937 had urged the churches

⁸² the citation in Baillie's text is for *The Interpretation of History*, p24

⁸³ *ibid.* p8

⁸⁴ *ibid* p9 – on p10 he claims Tillich's teaching on this is "exactly similar"

to stick to spiritual concerns. Baillie's final words are defiant: "As against that, I am an adherent of the social gospel."⁸⁵

The Baillie archives offer us another important insight into his developing engagement with these issues. J.H. Oldham's Moot had begun meeting in April 1938 and at its third meeting in January 1939, the first item on the agenda was a review of the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain's *True Humanism*⁸⁶ by John Baillie. Baillie is lavish in his praise for the book agreeing with its' criticism of Luther and Calvin for their "nominalism, voluntarism, dualism and extreme anti-humanism".⁸⁷ Baillie endorses Maritain's project of uniting what the Reformers cut asunder in "a unity of an altogether looser and more elastic kind than the old".⁸⁸ He finds Maritain's analysis strikingly congruent with the analysis he has been presenting to New College students 'during the last four years'.⁸⁹

Baillie agrees with Berdyaev that we are now living at "The End of the Renaissance" – the humanistic tradition which sought freedom from a stifling theocratic control has resulted over the centuries in an anthropocentric reduction. Now that same humanism is challenged by the new totalitarianisms of fascism and communism. Modern man [sic] has found that his long fought for freedom "no longer interests him", he does not know what it is *for*.⁹⁰ The need now is to "envisage an outlook which is humanist without being anthropocentric and this Maritain calls *integral* or *theocentric* humanism... I feel that Maritain's attempt .. is very much on the right lines". It is not so much new to Baillie (he cites Karl Adam, Berdyaev and von Hügel

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p12; cf a quote from Baillie's speech to a 1938 Dunblane Conference on 'Church and Community' cited by Stewart Brown in which Baillie apparently says he had felt a need 'to turn to Christian socialism to offset the emphasis on quietism.' Morton ed. 1994, 27 This sounds like a rather unguarded remark for Baillie and I have not found any other place in which he identifies himself overtly as a socialist.

⁸⁶ based on lectures delivered in 1934, published in French in 1937 as *Humanisme Integrale* and in English in 1938

⁸⁷ BAI-05-53 TS p2

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p3

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p6

as precedents) but it is “very well expressed”.⁹¹ What Baillie finds here in Maritain, we might say is a *mediating* conception of a “*secular Christian order*”:

The temptation of Mediaevalism was to make the State belong to God outright; Augustine, Luther and Barth seem to give it over completely to the devil; anthropocentric humanism has seemed to give it over completely to the domain of man and nature. But to Maritain it is the domain of all three at once. The earthly city is he says, ambivalent. The Kingdom of God can never be realised in it, but may be refracted in it.⁹²

Baillie sees a strong correspondence between Maritain’s view and Niebuhr’s (less so with Brunner’s which he feels reinstates a Thomistic natural/positive law distinction). The new social unity Maritain envisages grants a relative independence to temporal activities – politics and religion are essentially different spheres of action; a clear distinction is maintained between Christians acting ‘as such’ while organised as a church and Christians engaged in political action in the secular sphere; Maritain is convinced “the leaders of such a Christian temporal polity will be laymen” (Baillie notes here the remarkable resemblance to Oldham’s thinking before during and since the Oxford conference); the unifying Christian influence will take place through a kind of *diaspora* of Christian cells; “although its leadership will be Christian and the whole ordering of its life under Christian inspiration” the unity of this new Christendom will be pluralistic, with room for great human (and non-Christian) diversity within it.⁹³ It will be a minimal, practical and functional unity based not on dogmatic agreement but on “civil tolerance” and will crucially depend on demonstrating how its Christian conception conforms to “good reason and the common good”. Baillie alludes to the discussion at previous Moots of a “Christian totalitarianism” but argues that:

the new Christian order envisaged by Maritain is not totalitarian... It is perhaps half way between a liberal and a totalitarian order⁹⁴..It seems to me that this conception of a relative

⁹¹ *ibid.* p6

⁹² *ibid.* p7

⁹³ *ibid.* p8

⁹⁴ The Maritain quote Baillie incorporates here has worrying overtones: “the pluralist commonwealth, though less concentrated than the mediaeval, is much more concentrated than the liberal conception. It is an authoritarian state.” (TH 176)

pluralism is a most valuable one and carries us distinctly further than we were at the last Moot. Perhaps here we are shown, in the political sphere, how to transcend the weakness of liberal democracy without surrendering to the totalitarian principle.

At the same time Maritain seems to show us, in the economic sphere, a way of transcending the distinction between capitalism and communism and finding a half-way house between them. Yet this post-capitalist order will by no means be communist.. However, Maritain's suggestions in economics seem to me less important than his suggestions in politics.⁹⁵

Baillie concludes the paper by asking how far Maritain really succeeds in attaining a clear view of the relation of religion to politics? Here we see movement from the Swanwick paper a year earlier – Maritain “rightly sees” that the common attempt to divide political questions into moral and technical aspects is “too simple”.⁹⁶ We are faced with a deeper problem of two divergent conceptions of the ‘ends’ of human activity. In a fascinating compressed discussion of the nature of ‘political theology’⁹⁷, Baillie notes the Stoic background to Augustine’s ‘two cities’ schema and surveys three main options arising from Christian tradition: the Thomistic account where the State is ordered according to natural law; the Lutheran doctrine of the orders, lately reworked by Brunner; and Troeltsch’s historical conclusion that the church-state relation is always one of compromise. Baillie reads Maritain’s option as neither Thomist nor Lutheran, but a ‘lesser evil’ version of Troeltsch’s doctrine of necessary compromise. This appears similar to Niebuhr’s approach, but in a final revealing twist, Baillie offers a trenchant theological criticism of Niebuhr, arguing against Niebuhr’s view that we should not even to try to actualise the ethical ideal of the Gospel.⁹⁸ He sees Niebuhr’s dualism as overdrawn and because ultimately grounded in human finitude (rather than mere secularity or temporality), incapable of even an eschatological resolution! His verdict is firm - “I feel that this is wrong” – but neither has Maritain resolved satisfactorily “this ultimate question of the relation between religion and politics”.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p10 emphasis in original

⁹⁶ This was Baillie’s own approach in the 1937 paper.

⁹⁷ my term not his

⁹⁸ *op cit.* 12; c.f. Milbank’s phrase ‘the poverty of Niebuhrism’

⁹⁹ *ibid.* 13; This discussion is important and is reflected in passages in the reports of the Baillie Commission. The secondary literature rightly emphasizes the links between Baillie and Niebuhr, but there is little sense of

It is clear from these two examples, the January 1938 lecture and the paper of January 1939, that Baillie is indeed on a pilgrimage, that he is making choices and sharpening positions in response to the grave historical challenge which confronts theology and the church. His response has been decisively shaped by the preparations for and the work of Oxford 1937. From 1934 onwards and especially after 1937¹⁰⁰, a new synthesis emerges in his thinking – a synthesis which can be identified as constituting a ‘political theology’ and one which exercises a crucial guiding influence, in some cases we might almost say a ‘template’ for the work of the Baillie Commission.

There are four main elements to this new synthesis, which I want to examine in turn, before moving on to the reports of the Commission themselves:

1. *A revised theological anthropology and epistemology*

The description which attaches itself most naturally to John Baillie, is that of a ‘philosophical theologian’ whose characteristic concerns were with anthropology, epistemology and ethics. However, I believe Baillie’s development as a ‘political theologian’ should not be read in opposition to this or merely as a kind of adjunct to his philosophical concerns. Baillie’s prime philosophical mentor at Edinburgh University had been Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, a leading figure within the ‘Scottish Idealist’ school who had co-edited what David Boucher calls ‘the manifesto of Scottish Hegelianism’ in 1883, but soon after rejected Absolute Idealism and “was at the forefront in Britain of leading the revolt against [it] and championing the cause of Personal Idealism or Personalism as it came to be known.”¹⁰¹ Leading Scottish idealists whose positions Seth distanced himself from, included Edward Caird and Henry Jones, both of whom were deeply involved in

how and where they differed in their thinking. This passage therefore offers a key insight into the main criticism Baillie brings against his friend’s approach.

¹⁰⁰ despite Oldham’s caveat, the Conference itself seems to have had a major effect on Baillie.

¹⁰¹ Boucher ed. 2004

exploring the radical political implications of Hegelian philosophy. In his important study of British political theology, the late David Nicholls describes the influence Caird and his older teacher/colleague at Baliol, T.H. Green had on students such as William Temple and William Beveridge.¹⁰² The philosophical climate within which John Baillie was formed and whose concerns he absorbed, had always been keenly aware of the political dimensions and functions of philosophy. Caird and Seth both addressed Kant's and Hegel's conceptions of the State in their own writing. They were public, even political philosophers whose concerns were religious and political even as they were philosophical. An awareness of this tradition to which Baillie was close (he was teaching assistant to Andrew Seth after his first degree), helps us to see how the call upon his resources in the 1930s to address questions of the idolatrous role of the state was continuous with key elements of his own philosophical training. By the time this call came, Baillie's philosophical allegiances were also shifting, though arguably in a direction Seth had already begun to point. David Fergusson has drawn attention to "the significant shift in Baillie's approach to epistemology" evident in *Our Knowledge of God* (1939)¹⁰³. In this book we find Baillie moving away from the perspectives of the Cartesian subject and Kantian transcendental reflection on experience towards a relational epistemology¹⁰⁴. Baillie speaks of our knowledge of other minds as "itself a primary and original mode of consciousness" and "the conception of society as an *a priori* conception".¹⁰⁵ This claim is then developed here in relation to his key concept of 'mediated immediacy'.

Rather than the other two being inferred analogically from our knowledge of self and the world, Baillie suggests that "no one of the four subjects of our knowledge – ourselves, our fellows, the corporeal world and God – is ever presented to us

¹⁰² Nicholls 1989, 33

¹⁰³ Fergusson ed. 1993, 141 and ff.

¹⁰⁴ Fergusson describes this as 'critical realism' – a term not used by Baillie in 1939.

¹⁰⁵ Baillie 1939, 213

except in conjunction with all three of the others”.¹⁰⁶ Our knowledge in these four modes is therefore characterised by an ‘immediacy’ and simultaneity; we know by means of an existentially direct intuition in which each of these knowledges is mediated by the other three. Beyond this formal account of epistemological modalities (how we know), there is a further endless process of mediation which takes place *as we know* – this is the historical and social mediation of knowledge.¹⁰⁷

It is this epistemological shift (and its later outworking) reflecting the influence of Buber, Grisebach¹⁰⁸, Hocking and to a degree, Heidegger¹⁰⁹ which led Beveridge and Turnbull in their Scottish intellectual retrieval of 1989 to identify Baillie as part of what they term “the Scottish personalist school” alongwith John MacMurray, Ronald Gregor Smith and John Macquarrie.¹¹⁰ Duncan Forrester cautiously endorses this, but insists it does not “in itself” make Baillie a social theologian.¹¹¹ David Fergusson suggests the shift does move Baillie towards being a contextual theologian.¹¹²

My argument is that Baillie as philosophical theologian and Baillie as political theologian are of a piece and more so than either Forrester or Fergusson display in their accounts. (An interesting comparison might be with the way in which the political relevance of John Macmurray’s personalist philosophy came to public attention in the UK in the 1990s in the light of Prime Minister Tony Blair’s claims to have been influenced by him.) While he was not an overtly political writer, Buber’s relational ontology and epistemology had a profound influence on many in Baillie’s generation, offering them a profound yet accessible metaphysic which could serve

¹⁰⁶ Baillie 1939, 178

¹⁰⁷ Baillie 1939, 213-214

¹⁰⁸ Keith Clements notes how deeply Oldham was influenced by Buber and Grisebach’s thinking and clearly Baillie and Oldham cross-fertilised each other intellectually; see Clements 1999, 273

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the list should also include Maritain – who offered a distinctive Thomist personalism and Macmurray, whose work Baillie certainly knew well (as the Moot minutes make clear), although he does not cite it in his published writings from this period.

¹¹⁰ Smith – one of John Baillie’s graduate students - translated Buber’s *Ich Und Du* at Baillie’s instigation

¹¹¹ Fergusson ed. 1993, 221-2

¹¹² Fergusson ed. 1993, 143, 144 see also Fergusson’s comments in Morton ed. 1994, 33

as a (non-Marxist) philosophical basis for religious/Christian ‘socialism’ in the way that the neo-Hegelian idealism of Caird had for a previous generation. Buber’s significance in this respect can be seen in the way his thinking was also appropriated by J.H. Oldham, a long term friend and collaborator of John Baillie. While the influence of Grisebach and Hocking was also highly significant, it was Buber – and his Scottish translator Ronald Gregor Smith - who provided one of the primary rhetorics which Oldham and Baillie drew on in their social theology.¹¹³

There is however, a further significant move which Baillie makes in *Our Knowledge Of God*, which is to promote ecclesiology to a key role in theological epistemology. He does this within his chapter on “A Mediated Immediacy” and while David Fergusson has rightly pointed out that there are unresolved tensions in his theological method here,¹¹⁴ my concern here is not to defend Baillie’s method, but to draw attention to his conclusion. Baillie identifies four key media by which the knowledge and presence of God comes to us:

- service of and love for others
- fellowship with others *in the Church* (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*)
- historical transmission of the narrative tradition of Israel and Jesus
- the Incarnation of Jesus the one mediator between God and men

He argues that:

“The service of others, the fellowship with others and the historical tradition in which I stand are all media which lead me to the Mediator and the Mediator leads me to God. And all this

¹¹³ It is however interesting that in the Moot discussions, Baillie continues to argue for the importance of Kant and for the compatibility of Kantian themes with the approach of Buber and Grisebach. He sees a clear continuity and affinity between treating someone as “an end” and relating to them as “an other”.

¹¹⁴ Fergusson ed. 1993, 146 and 150 where he speaks of the apparent “disjointedness” in Baillie’s argument in its portrayal of the relations of language and experience, doctrine and epistemology; there is also a good discussion of these issues in an interesting 1978 study by Baptist theologian William Powell Tuck, *Knowing God: Religious Knowledge in the Theology of John Baillie*; Tuck 1978. This study is not cited by any of the 1990s scholarship or by Newlands, but is certainly as important as Klinefelter’s work in this area. It is also particularly interesting in its discussion of the relation of Baillie’s view of faith and knowledge to his (and Barth’s) position on baptism.

mediation is part of God's gracious purpose in refusing to unite me to Himself without at the same time uniting me to my fellow men."¹¹⁵

Here at the heart of his theological epistemology Baillie asserts "the necessity of the church" for our knowledge of God.¹¹⁶

Alongside this and with a remarkably contemporary resonance (since Baillie would not normally be described as a 'narrative theologian') Baillie makes direct use of the language of 'story' – centrally but not exclusively the biblical stories – within Christian formation, as the media of divine revelation. In particular, he says, the story of the Incarnation and the Cross is decisive for the interpretation of all other history.¹¹⁷ He endorses Tillich's notion of Christ as *die Mitte der Geschichte* and questions "whether anything can be history for the Christian which does not stand in relation to Christ as its centre".¹¹⁸

Baillie's epistemological shift is not fully worked through or integrated. It attempts to maintain some connections with what Fergusson calls his earlier "moral theism" while using the insights of personalist and existentialist philosophy to chart a creative path between Barth and Brunner.¹¹⁹ It raises significant problems in relation to the theology of revelation, to which Baillie will return after the war.¹²⁰ Its immediate effect, however, is to consolidate a new working theological position which combines a progressive social philosophy with a vigorous theological orthodoxy. Within this, a central place is given to the Church because, to use the words of Donald Baillie: "it is the Church that has to tell the story".¹²¹

2. A Revitalised Ecumenical Ecclesiology

¹¹⁵ Baillie 1939, 180

¹¹⁶ Baillie 1939, 179

¹¹⁷ Baillie 1939, 186

¹¹⁸ Baillie 1939, 187; in *Invitation To Pilgrimage* Baillie claims that "The Bible as a whole consists of nothing so much as of what we should now call a philosophy of history." Baillie 1942, 99

¹¹⁹ see chapters 2-4 in *Our Knowledge of God* for his discussion of Barth and Brunner

¹²⁰ In his book *The Idea of Revelation In Recent Thought* (1956)

¹²¹ Baillie, D. *God Was In Christ*, 1948, 203

Ecclesiology was promoted to a central place in Baillie's theological epistemology and this epistemological role for ecclesiology, as we have just noted, had a practical and ethical dimension to it. Saving knowledge of God was mediated through belonging to the church and was not given apart from it. To this, what we might call 'internal' function of ecclesiology for believers in their 'knowing' God in the world, we can say that there corresponds an 'external' function of ecclesiology in Baillie's thinking, as 'showing' God to the world. After Oxford 1937, this conception of the church as 'exemplary witness' to the Gospel assumes increasing importance in his work and, I will argue, assumes a clear political role.¹²²

We see this above all in *Invitation To Pilgrimage*, the Alexander Robertson Lectures 'in defence of the Christian religion' delivered at the University of Glasgow in the Summer of 1941 and published the following year. Here we have our first example of Baillie's wartime apologetic, we might even call it a wartime missiology. Baillie addresses himself to those who "stand within the inheritance of the Christian religion" yet find themselves disengaged from it. (8) The forgetfulness of Christianity in the modern world is a reproach on the Church's divided and confused witness.(12) However, he believes the self-confident intellectual opposition to Christianity of the 19th century, in its liberal humanist and Marxist forms has been in retreat since the First World War.(16/17) Rationalism "has overreached itself" and "passed into something very like its own opposite". We are living, in Berdyaev's phrase, 'at the End of the Renaissance, and 'in despair of the unity which is lost' (Maritain). (27) Truth and reason now need to seek the help of the Christian Church in their battle against new and powerful forces of unreason.(28) As is witnessed by the example of Hitler's Germany, the Church may be the best and only hope for the defence of liberal values and virtues. (28) Christianity must learn from "the humanistic protest" and humanism "must find its way back into the ultimate shelter of a full Christian commitment'.(29) The present eclipse of reason and humanity can

¹²² c.f. R. H. Preston's comment in relation to the 1930s that "Totalitarianism inspired a new stress on the church which had been somewhat downplayed in favour of a concentration on building the kingdom of God (naively conceived)." in Reeves ed. 1999, 144

be traced to their detachment from God.(30) Christianity is the highest form of realism. (36) The only centre of the real world is God. (55) The disillusionment of the present generation and its chastened realism makes the Gospel more believable.(78) The message of the New Testament, rejected by moderns who feel “at home” in the world, is only accepted when and so far as people recognise themselves as “*peregrini et hospites super terram*”.(79) The modern view that “man makes himself” is radically at odds with a biblical philosophy of history. (83) Here Christ is the centre of history.(89) Disillusionment with the earthly city may open the way to a new believing pilgrimage to the Celestial City.(92) The Bible’s concern is “not the immortality of the individual soul” but “community and.. the end and destiny of community”.(99)

You cannot be a Christian in your moral principles and a Buddhist or Nazi or any other kind of pagan in your religion.
..... You cannot be a Christian in your ethics without being a Christian also in your eschatology. (102/3)

Christian eschatology, while allowing “perfect society can exist only in heaven” nevertheless insists that God helps us to set earthly society in order.(105) In the desperate conflict of this war, “we are fighting for right against wrong” – never has a cause been better or an opposition more evil. (106)

“There is nothing of which we are more assured than that it is our duty to oppose the unprincipled tyranny of Hitler’s ‘new order in Europe’ and to work with all our might towards the establishment of an order or a radically different kind.” (106)

For honest and sensitive faith, the horror and suffering of war must provoke anguished questioning of God.(109) Its source in human evil and the grace which suffering can bring are real but only partial answers.(113) In response to suffering as to sin, ultimately Christianity can only repeat to us “the story of the life and suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”. (116)

The apologetic of *Invitation To Pilgrimage* might have stopped here, but Baillie adds a remarkable final chapter as the culmination of his argument – *Invitation to Church*. The following fourteen pages are unlike anything he has previously published and they are crucial to the argument of this chapter.

Baillie begins by reiterating his insistence on the Biblical concern for the community. He argues that the prophetic tradition in Israel, with its conception of the ‘faithful remnant’, introduced to the world “the distinction between religious and national community” which “carries with it the possibility of men of all nations sharing the same religion.”¹²³ This possibility is fulfilled in Christ and the community of Christian believers “alone is now the true Israel, elect of God and called to be His witness among the nations”.¹²⁴ Baillie claims that ‘personal religion’ entered the world along with the idea of ‘universal community’ in Judaism and Christianity.¹²⁵ The relation between the individual soul and God “can be realized only within that universal community which is the Church of Christ”.

Baillie now begins to expound a doctrine of the Christian Church in terms which Alec Cheyne has suggested¹²⁴ exceed even the ‘rhapsodic’ vision offered by Donald Baillie at the close of *God Was In Christ*:

The Christian Church.. is neither a local thing nor a human thing, but is universal and divine. It has nothing to do with place or race, nor is it an association created by men for their own purposes... The Church is a divine society, created by God himself; a society to which men are elected, not by any human vote, but by the grace of God; a society whose one condition of membership is faith in God’s forgiving love. It is indeed a human society in the sense that its members are men and women, but it is a divine society in that its Head, on whom all its life depends, is the Son of God. (120)

The Church, in its self understanding as Christ’s Body, gave the world the vocabulary and conceptuality of ‘membership’. Baillie argues that only as members of Christ can we enjoy “full community with one another” and only as members of

¹²³ see the discussion above of his 1938 Swanwick lecture in which he cites the work of Burleigh in making this point

¹²⁴ Cheyne in Fergusson ed. 1993

one another “can we enjoy full community with Christ”.(121) In respect of the latter (and in terms which are strikingly similar to Hauerwas!) Baillie observes that “individualistic rationalism wanted the way of salvation to consist of a body of general ideas which was accessible to the solitary thinker in every time and place” (122) Yet God has chosen to work through the scandal of “historical particularity” – perhaps “to make it impossible for men to meet with God and to love Him without at the same time meeting with and loving one another”. (122) Whatever special exceptions it may please God to make, Baillie is clear that:

You and I owe all the knowledge of God that we have to our upbringing in the one tradition and our reception into the one fellowship of the Church of Christ, and the only way that is open to us whereby we should bring to others the blessings of that knowledge is by initiating them into the same tradition and receiving them into the same Church.(123)

With regard to the former statement, that “only in Christ can we enjoy full community with one another” – he now describes the contemporary world as a “new and tragic age”, which is “hungry for community”, experiencing a “returning desire for unity and community.. after the long reign of an amorphous heterogeneity and atomistic individualism”.(124) This hunger, for Baillie, is what has been answered in a perverted way by Nazism and Fascism and what has given those ideologies a power which “our recent atomistic individualism is likely to prove altogether too weak to resist”.(125) They must “be met by some communal solidarity of a purer and stronger kind” – but, he asks, “under what contrary ideals” can we “muster our forces in opposition” to Fascism?

Here Baillie makes a decisive move – he is doubtful whether the ideals of the classical and Christian ages (humanity, justice, liberty, brotherhood), in their present state of being uprooted from Christian belief, “have sufficient strength and conviction in them” to resist the forces opposing them.(125/6) He quotes William Paton’s 1941 book, *The Church and The New Order*:

"We now behold the results of trying to maintain a political valuation of man which had roots in a religious understanding of him, after that religious understanding has been forgotten."(127)

In tones unusual for the always measured Baillie, he asks scornfully:

Is this to be all the battle-cry we give to our youth as we fling them against the Nazi hordes – *it is doubtful whether men are really immortal souls but you must treat them as if they were?*(127)

"Our" ideals must be revitalised and renewed in communal terms. "Our only hope" says Baillie, "lies in another and nobler form of community". The only community which can offer an effective counter to totalitarianism is the Church of Christ, because it and it *alone* is both universal and "more than merely human".(128) It can therefore demand our total allegiance for something which is in its' own nature total, as against the similar idolatrous demand totalitarianism makes for something much narrower.(128)

The universality of the church is not merely an ideal – it is physically present throughout the world as a uniquely international body. Even regarded as a mere human association it is unrivalled in its ability to bridge the divisions between nations. It can transcend our human relativities (of race and colour and nation) because it is more than a human institution.(129) It offers a deeper grounding for our human ideals (humanity, *fraternité* , *égalité*) in the teaching and action of Christ himself.¹²⁵

Baillie argues that "the present chaos of human relationships throughout" the world demands a deeper vocabulary than natural law or human rights – in a notably

¹²⁵ In a remarkable passage, which again evokes Hauerwas in its 'grounding' of ethics in the narrative particularity of the biblical story, Baillie writes on p129 that "the Church can provide that deeper grounding for our cherished ideals without which they lack the substance and conviction necessary to make them triumphant in the present crisis. Then, instead of standing merely upon the abstract duty of being 'humane' to other members of my own human species, I shall remember that for these others Christ died. Instead of speaking abstractly of 'the indefeasible value of the individual', I shall remember Him who said, 'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones', and who, in terms of His own parable, went out into the wilderness to find the one sheep which was lost. And not only my championship of *fraternite*, but also my championship of *egalite* will be subtly yet potently changed by being given this deeper grounding. It will not longer be 'I am as good as you are', but rather 'You are as good as I am'. It will be an equality grounded in penitence rather than in self-assertion."

Barthian tone he calls rather for “a reassertion of the rights of God” and in a clear counter to Niebuhr, for “something better than mere justice, something more like Christian love”. Without their renewal from these deeper sources, justice, natural law and human rights will lack the capacity to do their work in the field of “political action”.¹²⁶

The weakness of our present situation is that men appear to be faced with a choice between two evils, on the one hands such a rediscovery of community as enslaves the individual to the state or the race or the nation and on the other an individualism which is powerless to resist such totalitarianism.... I see no way out of this predicament save by the reintegration of the ideals, which even in our individualism we continue to cherish, in a community of a genuinely universal kind. Only in the fellowship of the Eternal can we escape both the totalitarian and the individualistic heresies. Dr Paton suggests that the reason why ‘the British Commonwealth and the US may justly claim to represent the true tradition of the West’ is ‘that they hold to the truth that the State is not autonomous but subject to a higher law.’ But higher law ..[needs] ..embodiment in a higher community... The Church of Christ is such a universal community: it amply provides the corrective for individualism, and at the same time delivers us from earthly totalitarisms by directing our sovereign allegiance to God alone; while it further discourages us from taking precarious stand upon virtues which men can see that we do not possess and inclines us rather to stand before men as sinners who have found forgiveness and who are called upon, not merely to defend their own rights, but to love and serve their fellows and to forgive as they themselves have been forgiven.(130)

I hope then, that I have provided sufficient reason why we should all seek the fellowship of the Church of Christ, there to rekindle our ideals and rehabilitate them in a solidarity that is stronger than all the solidarities of earth. (131)

Baillie closes his wartime apologetic/missiology with a quotation from Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, where the lonely soul is invited once again “to walk together to the kirk, with a goodly company”.

I have argued in these last two sections that for Baillie we need the church to know God in the world, but also to show God in the world. There is no alternative. There is no other community which can take on this politically transcendent role. Baillie makes ecclesiology indispensable to his theological epistemology and gives it a central and highly political function in his missiology. This is not just an ideal church, but the Church of Christ as it exists throughout the world in 1941/2. Granted, it is

¹²⁶ In Geertzian terminology, Baillie is arguing that these discourses are too ‘thin’..

not a perfect church, but it is a forgiven church which is created by God and pledged to God.

3. *A Radicalised Social Economics*

The third major component of what I am calling Baillie's political theology is a radicalised social economics. We have already noted that Baillie's location in the Economics Section of the Oxford Conference was something of a surprise. It makes him a co-author of the unanimous report of that section to the conference. I accept that given the presence of Tawney and Demant, Baillie was unlikely to have been the major source for the ideas of this group but his participation in it is an important factor in considering the high profile and unexpectedly radical economic recommendations of the Baillie Commission.

The report reflects the mixed company who produced it. It seeks to go beyond basic theological teaching, while stopping short of detailed policy recommendations.⁽⁹⁰⁾ It emphasises the global character of the international economic system and argues that "the earlier stage of competitive capitalism has been gradually replaced by a monopolistic stage".⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ It condemns racial exclusion⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ and autocratic and tyrannical modes of economic control.^(107/8) Recognising the political fault lines between supporters of private enterprise and advocates of social ownership, it seeks to formulate mediating proposals ^(110/11) and to suggest a "framework for the Christian message [the teaching of the Church as a Church] in relation to the economic order in the next decade".⁽¹¹⁵⁾

This basic framework offered by Oxford addressed (i) the ends of economic activity, (ii) the consequences of current economic behaviour and (iii) the obstacles to economic justice. Specifically, it addressed the need to overcome extreme inequality and class division, to limit private accumulation of wealth and to attend to the social consequences of private property ownership. It called for equality of opportunity for children regardless of race or class and for an end to the economic

penalization of disability. It affirmed the duty and right to work and the need to use natural resources with care. It laid great stress on the need for Christians, especially those ‘on top’ to increase their awareness of how their economic location shapes their attitudes.¹²⁷ Its conclusion looked ahead:

In the next decade those who are responsible for guiding the life of the Church must seek, by means of these and other forms of teaching, to bring under moral control the attitude of their members in economic relationships – just as they have always sought to bring under moral control the attitude of their members in direct personal relationships. This task will involve far more than preaching. It must become an integral part of the whole life and atmosphere of the Church. The Church as a worshipping community must relate its acts of repentance and dedication to the economic order in which its members live.¹²⁸

John Baillie shared in the production of this document and was part of its unanimous endorsement by those within the economic track of Oxford 1937. The final shape of the Baillie Commission Reports is inconceivable without the precedent of this earlier report and later statements inspired by it, most notably the striking 1941 statement on “Social Justice and Economic Responsibility” issued by the Commission of the Churches of Britain for International Friendship and Social Responsibility.¹²⁹ These documents had very wide circulation and their principles were discussed extensively, particularly in *The Christian Newsletter* during the war. This does not diminish the bold economic proposals made in the Baillie Commission, but it does set them in a clearer context. Their importance lies not so much in their originality, since most of what they said had been anticipated in these earlier documents. It lies rather in their role in consolidating existing trends in Christian social thought and having them explicitly endorsed by a major UK denomination. Any discussion of the Commission Reports which portrays their economic thinking as unprecedented or springing out of nowhere is well wide of the

¹²⁷ Oldham ed. 1937 121

¹²⁸ *ibid.* 124

¹²⁹ Clements notes that this body, chaired by William Temple, with Archie Craig as its secretary, merged the English Christian Social Council and the British Christian Council and consciously intended to follow up both the Life and Work and Faith and Order conferences of 1937. It would evolve into the British Council of Churches in 1942 after a further merger with Oldham’s Council for Christian Faith and the Common Life. Clements 1999, 408-411

mark. John Baillie himself is the direct and crucial link between the economic thinking of Oxford 1937 and the economic proposals of the Baillie Commission.

4. A Renewed Conception of Christendom

The final element in Baillie's developing political theology which deserves further consideration is the question, touched on already, of how to envisage the relation of Church and Society. Here there appear to be two primary influences on Baillie – Jacques Maritain and T.S. Eliot – in particular, Maritain's *True Humanism* (1938) and Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939).¹³⁰

We can see from the 1938 paper on the Church and his 1942 Alexander Robertson Lectures/*Invitation to Pilgrimage* that Baillie was wrestling with the church-state question throughout this period. Oxford had raised as many questions as it had given answers. In *The Moot*, this was the continuous underlying question on the agenda. Apart from the minutes of Moot discussions, to isolate Baillie's own thinking on this point, we have to refer to the later discussion in his 1945 Riddell Lectures – published as *What is Christian Civilization?*. In his discussion of John Baillie's contribution to the Moot, Keith Clements draws attention to his remarkably broad and deep historical perspective on ideas, his "large-scale consciousness of the history of western thought".¹³¹ Here in the Riddell Lectures, Baillie offers another historical and theological *tour de force* in his analysis of the forms of Christian engagement with society from the early Church to the present day. Rejecting both the *compulsive* idea of Christian civilization and sectarian/dissenting protests against the whole conception, Baillie draws on Maritain and Eliot to defend an *open* Christian civilization, characterised by what Thomas Chalmers had called a "diffused" Christianity.¹³² He agrees with TS Eliot's definition of a Christian society

¹³⁰ The relationship between Eliot and Baillie goes back to Baillie's time in America, when Eliot visited him on a number of occasions. They were both invited to join *The Moot* by Oldham and were present together at eight of the twenty meetings. George Newlands notes from the Baillie archives that John Baillie attended a conference on 'The Church and the Social Order' at the University of Glasgow in September 1941; Newlands 2002, 220

¹³¹ Fergusson ed. 1993, 206, 205

¹³² Baillie 1946, 19, 56

as a society of “men whose Christianity is communal before being individual”¹³³ and with his judgment that “A society has not ceased to be Christian .. until it has become positively something else..”.¹³⁴ Alongside this he sets Maritain’s positing of a minimal social unity which is “not consecrationally but secularly Christian” and is characterised by a “pluralism” which makes it “inclusive of non-Christians”.¹³⁵ Maritain envisages a politics “inspired by Christian principles”, which is led by Christians and whose cogency is acknowledged by non-Christians, who take part in it freely.¹³⁶ Baillie affirms this common direction of Maritain’s and Eliot’s thought as generally representative of his own position.¹³⁷

While this reflection comes from 1945, we find it clearly anticipated in an earlier writing of Baillie’s. Despite his deep sympathy with the Confessing Church and his regard for Barth’s ecclesiological thinking, Baillie always had serious reservations about this more ‘sectarian’ approach to the question. We are given an insight into his thinking in an article he wrote in January 1942 for *Christianity and Crisis*, the American counterpart to Oldham’s *Christian Newsletter*. The article, entitled “Christianity and the Ideals of the West”¹³⁸ takes the form of a response to Karl Barth’s *Letter to Great Britain From Switzerland*. Baillie asks “what are we fighting for?” and answers that “it is undoubtedly the central values of Western civilization we are defending against the threat of Nazi barbarism”.¹³⁹ He summarises these values as: (i) the democratic ideal of the rights of the majority; (ii) the liberal ideal of the rights of the individual; (iii) the ideal of toleration and ‘the four freedoms’ (iv) liberty, equality, fraternity and humanity – “the rights of man”. Baillie then responds to Karl Barth’s critique in his *Letter to Great Britain* of these reasons for war, made on the grounds that these ideals are “non-theological” and “non-Christian”. Baillie first concedes the real force and relevance of Barth’s objection. He argues in terms

¹³³ Baillie’s citation is from *The Idea of a Christian Society* p59

¹³⁴ Baillie, 1946, 47

¹³⁵ *ibid.* 49

¹³⁶ *ibid.* 50

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *op cit.* pp3-6 in *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol 1, No 24, Jan 12 1942

¹³⁹ *op cit.* 4

similar to *Invitation to Pilgrimage*¹⁴⁰ that while these ideals were largely shaped by Christian influences in previous eras, in their current “uprooted” and “detached” form they are suffering serious deterioration. They are becoming less powerful and effective, because separated from the rituals of worship; they are being individualised, because taken up apart from the Christian Church; and they are being secularised. However, and here Baillie makes his stand – it is true that “the attempt to state these ideals in a detached form leads to deterioration - *And yet there are purposes for which the attempt must be made.*” He continues:

Christians are today fighting side by side with the adherents of other (and no) religion in a *common cause*. Barth's principles would seem to imply that we Christians are opposing Hitler for entirely different reasons from these others, but that is not only absurd but dangerously divisive. We are all up to a certain point, defending the same values and opposing the same evils. Our British commonwealth like all others, is a mixed society and Christians form only one element in it.... It is accordingly absolutely necessary that we should be able to state our case in terms which can be accepted by Christians and non-Christians alike. A Christian's reasons can never be quite identical with a Jew's, nor either with an atheist's. But there may (and must for united action) be in them all a Highest Common Factor. This Highest Common Factor in the various positive faiths and codes is precisely what was originally meant by that Natural Law, the appeal to which is so much deprecated by Barth... we must have *some* conception that will serve the ends of our common cause. All a Christian's ideals must indeed be grounded in the incarnation and passion and resurrection of our Lord, but he must be content to express himself in other and reduced terms in such of his pronouncements as are intended to rally to a common effort those who do not share his own Christian faith. It is difficult to feel therefore that Barth's friendly protest is entirely justified.¹⁴¹

John Baillie regarded the task of giving an account of how church and society /state were to be related as extremely complex and never felt himself to have fully resolved it. The minutes of the 13th Moot on 22 December 1941, record that participants shared “individual experiences of conflict and difficulty” and that these included “The Difficulties involved in formulating official advice to the Christian Churches on the interpretation of the Will of God in the present crisis (this with special reference to a Commission set up by the church of Scotland but having obvious wider reference)”.¹⁴² Even so, by 1942, John Baillie had formulated a

¹⁴⁰ delivered around six months earlier

¹⁴¹ op cit 5 – I have quoted at greater length here because this article is not discussed elsewhere in the secondary literature.

¹⁴² Minutes of Meeting 13, Baillie Archive

definite position, influenced by the work of Maritain and Eliot, which aimed at a spiritual renewal of Scottish public life in terms of an open model of Christian civilization.¹⁴³ This model, a third way between a totalitarian and liberal polity, envisaged Christian leadership and initiative building on the waning but still widely diffused Christian character of Scottish/British society and working for the revitalisation of Western ideals by reconnecting them with their deepest sources in Christian belief and practice. It envisaged a Church which would give substantive teaching and guidance about the Christian ends of political and economic activity, while allowing those spheres a relative autonomy and relying on lay Christians engaged in political action to work out the detailed implications of the Church's teaching within those spheres. Finally, it acknowledged the need to also attempt to articulate Christian ideals in a detached form for the purpose of making common cause with non-Christians within a pluralist society.

I have argued that from 1934 onwards and especially after 1937, a new synthesis emerges in John Baillie's thinking – a synthesis which can be identified as constituting a 'political theology' and one which exercises a crucial guiding influence, in some cases we might almost say a 'template' for the work of the Baillie Commission. I have given an account of that synthesis in terms of four elements: *a revised theological anthropology and epistemology; a revitalised ecumenical ecclesiology; a radicalised social economics; and a renewed conception of Christendom*. I now turn to the work of the Commission itself.

The [Baillie] Commission for the Interpretation Of God's Will in the Present Crisis
(CGWPC)

¹⁴³ c.f. David Fergusson: "Many of the particular proposals of Maritain together with his notion of a new Christendom are the key influences upon Baillie's efforts in the 1940s to argue for an open Christian civilisation." Morton ed. 1994, 34

The Baillie Commission was established by the Church of Scotland in May 1940, to be convened by Rev Professor John Baillie, who held the chair of Divinity at New College in Edinburgh¹⁴⁴. George Newlands cautions that we cannot tell how much of the report was actually written by Baillie¹⁴⁵, but the size of the Commission, with around forty ministers and elders working on it (all of whom were male), meant that the collation, editing and writing up of their deliberations must have been delegated to a smaller core in which Baillie took a leading role. We also have the witness of the committee itself in an Addendum to their final 1945 report, where they say:

The members of the Commission ... owe much to the skilful and sympathetic leadership of Professor Baillie... they are united in acknowledging that in their final form the Reports for which the Commission has been responsible have been *largely dependent not only for their substance, but also for their actual shaping and wording*, on his fine scholarship, his comprehensive theological knowledge and his notable power of terse and lucid statement.¹⁴⁶ (emphasis added)

The final report testified that their deliberations had seen a ‘very great degree of unanimity’ and the commission had been ‘an adventure in genuinely corporate thinking’.¹⁴⁷ Without doubting this, the fulsome acknowledgment they make to John Baillie in relation to ‘substance...shaping and wording’ should be taken with all seriousness. If we compare our survey of Baillie’s writings between 1938 and 1942 with the text of the Commission reports, it is clearly possible to go much further than Newlands does. Many sections of the reports correspond almost exactly with passages from Baillie’s own writings and the way its main themes are drawn everywhere reflects Baillie’s analysis and judgments. His prose style and his preoccupations can be detected on almost every page of the reports. It is hard to identify a single passage where the reports seem to depart from or be in strong tension with an approach to the question he has not at least sketched or intimated

¹⁴⁴ Other officers included Matthew Stewart, Vice-Convenor who was in 1942 Convenor of the Church and Nation Committee; J. Hutchison Cockburn Vice-Convenor (1944), E.J. Hagan Secretary. The Leader of the Iona Community G.F. MacLeod was convenor of the Industrial Relations working group. Alex Kydd of the Foreign Missions department was a member.

¹⁴⁵ Newlands 2002, 215

¹⁴⁶ CoS RGA, 1945, 485

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

elsewhere. These are strong claims and a detailed 'source critical' defence of them would demand more space than can be given here to prove a point which may not deserve to be pressed home *ad nauseam*. Still, the extent of his influence is striking and a testimony to his intellectual authority and the thoroughness of his engagement with the issues to hand in the decade leading up to the Commission.

Just as Oldham's editorial control had made the Oxford reports more readable and cohesive than might have been expected, so Baillie's editing and drafting of the Commission reports must be seen as a significant factor in the very considerable international attention paid to them. The reports 'read' for the most part like the work of a single mind. Doubtless there was great unanimity, but Baillie's own style gives the reports an evenness of tone and a 'voice' which enables them to transcend the bureaucratic compromises which a less 'dependent' process of drafting and composition might have produced.

Terms of Reference

The Commission's terms of reference from the 1940 General Assembly were:

To seek reverently to guide the Church in the interpretation of the Holy Will and Purpose of God in present-day events and to examine how the testimony of the Church to the Gospel may become more effective in our own land, overseas and in the international order.

The Commission explained in 1941 that it had interpreted this remit as involving a twofold task:

- I. The preparation of a statement regarding the spiritual significance of the crisis through which we are passing.
- II. The examination of a variety of questions and practical issues of supreme importance for the life and work of the Church.

Reading the reports fifty years later from within a generation which has not experienced war on this scale, the sense of crisis and gravity is profound. It is

striking, however, that on the first page of their 1941 report, immediately after clarifying their remit in terms of this twofold task, they make it clear that whatever else God's Will may be, they believe (or perhaps better, they are bound by the Church's belief expressed in Assembly resolutions) that it includes support in principle for Britain and her Allies in going to War. The General Assembly of 1940 had already affirmed a double identification with 'the nation'/'our country'. The identification was not uncritical, because the errors and failures were "our own", but it was wholly committed to endorsing and justifying "our country" at war. The 1941 report continues:

In view of this pronouncement, the Commission has regarded itself as primarily concerned with the spiritual significance of the present situation and has sought to set forth the way in which the Will of God, made known in Jesus Christ, may be interpreted in face of the world's distress, as giving the only ground of hope for men and nations.¹⁴⁸

There is therefore, an initial and massive presumption recorded at the outset of the Baillie Commission that the will of God made known in Jesus Christ is compatible with the war aims of the Allies. (That this was not the unanimously the Commission's view is certain from the example of its member George MacLeod, whose pacifism was already notorious and was sustained in the face of war, leading to his being banned from religious broadcasting by the BBC between 1939 and 1941.¹⁴⁹) The Commission in its report accepts that this is the will of the Assembly and in distinction from this (although a distinction which from so sophisticated a pen as John Baillie's, may be deliberately vague) describes its own primary concern as "spiritual significance".¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Ferguson 1990, pp175-7; MacLeod had encouraged pacifists to volunteer for the most dangerous jobs possible; John Baillie had gone to France with the YMCA in Feb 1940, staying until June, an experience which at least brought him very close to being 'in harm's way' Newlands, 2002, 214-6.

¹⁵⁰ However, Baillie himself was fully supportive of the war once attempts to negotiate peace broke down.

Their second task, to do with the life and work of the Church, was to be accomplished through the appointment of six sub-commissions with the following remits:

- I. The Content and Presentation of the Christian Message For Our Time
- II. Church Life and Organisation
- III. Marriage and the Family
- IV. Education
- V. Social and Industrial Life
- VI. Politics and International Relationships.

The Commission issued five reports in all in the years 1941 to 1945. The reports were bound in with General Assembly papers each year, but they were also printed up separately in paperback editions for which demand significantly outstripped supply. After the war, SCM published a compendium of the reports edited for a wider audience (with the Church of Scotland ‘housekeeping’ elements removed) which was translated into French and published in a number of other countries¹⁵¹.

Analysis of the Reports

The concern of this thesis is to show the distinctive articulation given to the church-world relationship in each of its historical examples. In this section, I examine how the reports of the Baillie Commission offer a three-fold account – of liberal society, of ecclesiology, and of the actual and ideal relation between the church and Scotland with a consequent agenda for Christian practice.

“The Present Crisis” - The Account of Liberal Society In the Reports

In a clear echo of the inter-war Barthian turn in theology, the first words of the 1941 ‘Statement’ declare that “God is speaking to mankind in the solemnising and chastening events and experiences of our time”. The Commission’s role is explicitly

¹⁵¹ as *Reconstruire? Sur Quelle Base?* (Bibliographical information unavailable on this and the further publications)

and primarily a *hermeneutical* one - God is speaking - the Commission was charged to interpret history not just by but as God's Word. This was one of the key areas in which John Baillie was almost uniquely qualified to give a lead. We have noted his claim that Christianity was nothing else so much as it was "a philosophy of history". The reports therefore include a significant number of 'diagnostic' reflections on 'the present crisis' – variously presented as the state of the world, of 'Western civilisation', of Christendom, of Europe, of Great Britain [sic] and of Scotland.

world

When 'the world' is mentioned, the negative 'Johannine' metaphorical sense is often highly visible. The world is "stricken, chaotic and sinful"¹⁵², marked by "anguish and failure".¹⁵³ However, there is also a strong global perspective in the reports. The Commission is conscious of advances in technology and communications creating a nascent common global civilisation¹⁵⁴ whose capacities for mass media and mass travel, like Roman roads, open up new routes for Christian mission.¹⁵⁵ However, it also senses a deep ambiguity in the spread of modern civilisation with its tendency to blight the sense of the supernatural and the unseen.¹⁵⁶

World affairs and the international order are open to the work of the Holy Spirit and the world needs and deserves the influence of international law.¹⁵⁷ Enforcement of law *between* nations requires that someone 'bear the sword', but this should be delegated to a 'common authority'. In place of a Machiavellian stress on 'national interest' they urge "the necessity of national sacrifice".¹⁵⁸

The Commission is committed to "freedom, justice and social security for all peoples". It is alert to the global dimensions of economics claiming that "the world

¹⁵² CoS RGA 1941, 706

¹⁵³ *ibid.* 715

¹⁵⁴ 1943, 441

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* 442

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* 478

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* 480

has in so many ways contracted into a single, interdependent economic community".¹⁵⁹ Conscious of the increasing popular support for Marxist interpretations of global capitalism, the reports themselves speak of "the present and apparently final phase of monopoly capitalism", highlighting its instability and its direct role in creating the conditions for war.¹⁶⁰ International currency speculation is denounced and warning given that the Church's neglect of economic questions, is forcing young people in India and China to seek secular solutions.¹⁶¹ Five minimum demands are set out for economic justice in a post-war world.¹⁶²

The world is God's creation. The very texture of the created world displays the interrelatedness of nations.¹⁶³ The Commission in 1943 senses a new conscience about 'the colonial problem' within the British nation – colonialism has been accompanied by "grievous wrongs" and a degrading of native populations who are "God's children", but "many peoples are not yet sufficiently mature politically" for self-government.¹⁶⁴ In 1944 it offers a much sharper critique of the colonial exploitation of Africa and the continuing severe economic discrimination against Africans.¹⁶⁵

The Commission is horrified by the Nazi programme of destruction and extermination of Jews and supports a return to Palestine alongwith religious and civil liberty for Jews in Scotland.

At the end of its final report, it is emphasised that we are living in a "world situation" and threatened by a "universal secularism".¹⁶⁶

Western civilization

In the Scotland of 1939, there was an acute awareness that the cultural logic of the majority Christian liberal democracies was under threat from three main sources.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.* 481

¹⁶⁰ CoS RGA 1944, 505; the Oxford Economics Section also uses this description

¹⁶¹ *ibid* 482

¹⁶² *ibid* 483

¹⁶³ *ibid* 484

¹⁶⁴ *ibid* 484

¹⁶⁵ CoS RGA 1944, 506-7

¹⁶⁶ CoS RGA 1945, 484

Church leaders had long been exercised by the challenge of Soviet Communism and its growing international influence. Despite the waverings of some in the early 1930s, by 1939 most Scottish church leaders and theologians were clear about the evils of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy. Between left and right, they were also intensely conscious of another threat emerging from within their own liberal capitalist formations, that of secularism. A fourth and rising threat to the legitimacy of 'Great Britain' was the unravelling legacy of empire and the rising demands for independence from colonised nations. All of these threats are charted in the pages of the reports and each is presented as a threat to community – as a political threat, a threat to the order of the 'polis' and even of the 'cosmos'. So the 1941 report speaks of "the inevitable collapse of a civilisation"(707), "a moral and spiritual crisis in the history of civilisation" (708), "grave defects in the spirit and structure of Western civilisation" (711) "the collapse of a social order" (714).¹⁶⁷ In a much quoted passage, the 1942 report urges that:

We must take deeply to heart the fact that it is what is called Christendom that is now in flames, that the evils from which the world is suffering were generated in the heart of societies which passed as Christian and that the question today arises in men's minds whether the civilisation of the West is any longer to be shaped and dominated by Christian influence. Our own Church, in particular, must ask itself seriously whether the present spiritual condition of Scotland is not due in part to its failure in faithfulness of witness...¹⁶⁸

The Commission believes that the optimistic humanism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is close to collapse, threatened by "a rising tide of cynicism and disillusionment".¹⁶⁹ Secularism has been a potent force but is now breaking down and the defects of the old secularist liberalism are becoming clear.¹⁷⁰ Liberalism was originally formed by Christianity, but has been deformed by secularism and debased by totalitarianism. The weakness of liberal individualism was that "it interpreted freedom in the sense of detachment from any historical community".¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ page numbers are from CoS RGA 1941

¹⁶⁸ CoS RGA 1942, 544

¹⁶⁹ CoS RGA 1942, 547

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.* 552

¹⁷¹ *ibid.* 553

The Commission detected “the returning spirit of *community* after the long reign of individualism”¹⁷² but warned that young people in particular, “weary of secularism and individualism” were turning to “artificially resuscitated paganisms” in their search for a transcendent understanding of community.¹⁷³

The ideals of western civilisation, when detached and uprooted from the Christianity which formed them are fatally weakened and unable to counter the threat of fascism. However, the liberal tradition in Western civilisation and the secular championing of liberal ideals have been an important corrective to dominant Christian traditions.¹⁷⁴ Communism, in particular has addressed a serious lack in the Church’s social teaching.¹⁷⁵

Europe

The Commission is clear about the need for a renewal in the post-war religious life of Europe. Europe – Scotland as well as Germany – will need to be re-evangelised.¹⁷⁶ Parts of it will also need to be fed, given economic aid, policed and punished.¹⁷⁷ The waning of religious influence in Europe has led to a secularisation of state education which paved the way for Nazism and must now be addressed.¹⁷⁸

Scotland

The large canvas on which Baillie works, means that little of the cultural analysis is specifically related to Scotland. Where it specifically mentions Scotland, the report covers the following points.

It notes that some sections of “our Scottish population” still naively cherish the expectation of Communism’s ‘brave new world’. These hopes should not be quenched but their fulfilment sought.¹⁷⁹ The Commission is concerned that

¹⁷² *ibid.* 553 – again a formulation of Baillie’s found in both his 1942 writings.

¹⁷³ *ibid.* 548

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* 556

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* 557

¹⁷⁶ CoS RGA 1942, 610

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ CoS RGA 1943, 469

¹⁷⁹ CoS RGA 1942, 547

Scotland has a very unsatisfactory record in relation to economic justice and a very uncertain industrial prospect for the future. It worries in its 1944 deliberations on Marriage and the Family, about the declining birth rate in Scotland, about rural depopulation and the consequences of both for future economic growth in Scotland.¹⁸⁰ Elsewhere, it speaks uncompromisingly of “the slum conditions of very large numbers of her people”¹⁸¹ and of the need for adequate housing if family life is to flourish.¹⁸² A growing number of Scotland’s people are unchurched¹⁸³, but the needed re-evangelisation of Scotland cannot take place “in abstraction from the crying needs of the poor and oppressed of our society”.¹⁸⁴ The church’s reluctance to attend to economic questions is hindering its appeal to “educated youth” in Scotland.¹⁸⁵

The Commission is ambivalent about changing relationships between women and men in Scotland, both welcoming the enhanced status of women and insisting absolutely on the prior claim of motherhood.¹⁸⁶ The increase in real companionate marriage is welcomed.¹⁸⁷

Scotland is a mixed society of Christian and non-Christian but the Commission maintains that “There are many in Scotland who have themselves no part in the Church’s corporate life, but who are glad to think that our public life is controlled by Christian moral standards.”¹⁸⁸

“The religious tradition of our Scottish schools has been maintained by popular consent”,¹⁸⁹ however, the last few decades have seen pervasive secularisation of Scotland’s state education.¹⁹⁰ The Commission believes that “denominational schools have a divisive effect on national life and an extension of this system would

¹⁸⁰ CoS RGA 1944, 486?

¹⁸¹ CoS RGA 1942, 602

¹⁸² CoS RGA 1944, 498

¹⁸³ CoS RGA 1942, 584

¹⁸⁴ John Baillie’s speech presenting the report to the 1942 General Assembly quoted by Duncan Forrester in Wright & Badcock ed. 1996, 265

¹⁸⁵ CoS RGA 1943, 482

¹⁸⁶ CoS RGA 1944, 492

¹⁸⁷ CoS RGA 1944, 496

¹⁸⁸ CoS RGA 1942, 572

¹⁸⁹ CoS RGA 1943, 470

¹⁹⁰ CoS RGA 1943, 470

be a retrograde step”.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless it looks for a great strengthening of the position of religion “in our schools” in view of the current cultural and spiritual crisis. The school cannot remain neutral in matters of ultimate belief:

...the whole nation is at present engaged in a life-and-death struggle in defence of those Christian values which have so largely shaped our national traditions. If these values are indeed to be preserved as the basis of our national life, we must not only defend them on the battlefield, but also perpetuate and enrich them through our schools and colleges.¹⁹²

In his Moderatorial address at the 1943 Assembly, John Baillie, returned to this theme:

A hundred years ago the principles of the Christian nation were the solid foundations of the nation's life. Both education and what we would now call the social services were almost entirely under the Church's control. All the great issues of the day were joined well within the circle of commitment to Christian belief, and not yet as between Christianity and something else that was not Christian..... How is it today? In the eyes of the law this is still a Christian country and our Church a national institution, but the reality of the situation has suffered a most alarming change. The life of our Scottish community has largely slipped its Christian moorings.¹⁹³

The 1945 report was also candid about the unprecedented changes in Scottish society:

Large numbers of our fellow-citizens have now altogether detached themselves from the fellowship of the Christian Church and for perhaps the first time in history we are confronted with the spectacle of a society a remarkable proportion of whose members make no religious profession of any kind.¹⁹⁴

The ‘real causes of this’ lie in the fact that the new ideas and movements of modernity have “defeated all attempts to control them from the point of view of a single all-embracing outlook on life”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ CoS RGA 1943, 470

¹⁹² CoS RGA 1943, 472

¹⁹³ Baillie 1943, p7/8

Prospects for Spiritual Renewal, Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1943

¹⁹⁴ CoS RGA 1945, 481

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.* Is this so far removed from Lyotard's ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’?

God's Will – The Ecclesiology of the Baillie Commission

The Commission were charged with the interpretation of God's Will. What did God want the Church of Scotland to be and to do in this present crisis? Themes from Oxford 1937 sound all the way through the reports, not least the famous slogan that the Church must be the Church:

“..the Church is called upon to explore the possibilities of its own corporate witness.... There is an important witness which we can bear in the corporate life of the Church as a voluntary society within our larger national society. The Church's word will not be effective if it speaks only by precept and not by example. There is a sense in which we are called upon, not merely to proclaim, but ourselves also to be “the interpretation of God's will in the present crisis.” ¹⁹⁶

Ecclesiology was more than just a topic within the Commission's reports, it provided the theological foundation for their work as a whole. The inter-war ecumenical movement had developed a powerful new narrative of the meaning of history, with the doctrine of the *Una Sancta* at its heart. John Baillie was a key figure in articulating the significance of the church within a Christian philosophy of history. Keith Clements, writing with a strong awareness of the 1930s influences which fed into the thinking of the Commission, sees its primary significance in its being:

..an outstanding example of an *ecclesiastical* reception, ownership and application, for its own context, of the wider ecumenical process of thought – something which happened rarely then and which happens less than it should today. In turn, this corporate ecclesiastical affirmation helped to familiarise many people – and not just in the Church of Scotland with the ideas that had been emerging in the further reaches of ecumenical study and debate and in somewhat secretive groups like the Moot.¹⁹⁷

At the heart of this reception of ecumenical thought was a direct attention to ecclesiology itself. The 1942 report spoke of:

¹⁹⁶ CIGWPC in Reports to General Assembly 1942, 593

¹⁹⁷ Morton ed. 1994, 56

the great need today for laying fresh emphasis upon the doctrine of the Church. It is a doctrine which in the Protestantism of recent generations has too frequently been denied its proper place, but this deficiency now demands to be made good.¹⁹⁸ (554-5)

While this new emphasis is evident in all of the reports, the key work was presented in the 1943 report, which stated:

The Church is essential to the Gospel. Apart from the fellowship which we are privileged to enjoy within it the Christian salvation and the Christian way of life cease to have real meaning. The Commission felt that the time was ripe for a strong reassertion of this fundamental Christian truth and that such a reassertion is likely to be effective only in conjunction with a clear and very explicit statement of what the Church believes about its own true nature and universal mission.¹⁹⁹

The Commission regarded ecclesiology as central to Christian opposition to totalitarianisms and was concerned that there was great uncertainty and confusion about ecclesiology in Scotland. It therefore devoted, in 1943, a full 19 pages of its 67 page report to an exposition of *The Church of Christ – Its True Nature and Its Universal Mission*. Six decades later, these 19 pages still have a fair claim to being the most significant and coherent exposition of ecclesiology in twentieth century Scottish theology.

Despite their willingness to acknowledge the faults and failings of the church, the 1943 report goes further than the previous year in claiming not only that the church as an ‘ideal type’ is incomparable in its universality/catholicity, but that this universality is already being ‘performed’:

no other society... is actually doing so much to bridge the gulfs that divide nation from nation, race from race, caste from caste.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ CoS RGA 1942, 554-5; George Newlands cites a letter of 8th December 1941, from Donald Baillie to John Baillie, on this report of CGWPC in draft form: “Though I would have thought that I was more Augustinian and anti-Pelagian and Barthian than you (!), the draft strikes me as leaning further in that direction than I would have done, especially perhaps as regards expression [...] I can’t help thinking that it is surprisingly Barthian [...] I think that George MacLeod would say that with all its emphasis on community, the only community that it treats as important is the Church.”

¹⁹⁹ CoSRGA 1943, 427

²⁰⁰ *ibid.* 428; this passage mirrors a passage in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*

Despite the onset of war having delayed the full establishment of the World Council of Churches, clear plans had been laid and agreed at Oxford/Edinburgh 1937 and shadow structures of various kinds were already in place in Geneva and in Canada. The Commission believed that the ecumenical Church was a forerunner of “the drawing together of the nations” in a “closer federation”, though warning that if the ecumenical task was neglected, the Church could one day fall behind the world. Asking about the nature of the Church in which Christians confess their belief through the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the Commission make a key opening move, (one which anticipates John Milbank by a generation!) declaring that although the church is a society, it is not merely one society among others:

It would be nearest the truth to regard the Church as itself the sociologist’s crucial and most difficult example, so that instead of endeavouring to understand it in the light of general principles derived from his observation of other and simpler forms of corporate life, he might do better to assume that if only he can understand what the Church is, his understanding of other social structures will be greatly aided and illuminated. Not only has the existence of the Church within Western civilisation stimulated the social and political thinkers of the last two thousand years, but it has also at all times greatly complicated the task of the practical politicians.²⁰¹

The Commission²⁰² here urge the sociologist to accept that theology has the key to their discipline – the church is, as it were, *sui generis*. It is more than a particular example of a general sociological type called ‘society’. This means the conventional wisdom of a hundred years must be overturned – no longer can it be asserted that the Church has no relevance to the problems of general society.

The Church can only be understood in relation to Old Testament Israel, whose understanding of their election and status as a covenant people were continually disciplined and developed by the prophets. Over against Israel’s apostasy, the idea of the faithful remnant began to enable the distinction between the national community and the holy community and the prospect of an international inclusiveness. The followers of Christ from the beginning saw themselves as

²⁰¹ *ibid.* 429;

²⁰² This passage is almost identical to the opening passage of Baillie’s 1938 Swanwick lecture discussed above.

continuous with this faithful remnant – they were the true Israel and the new Israel, inheritors of the promise.

They were no longer a natural community. They were not united to each other by any single national or racial tie..they knew themselves to be members of another and holy community which had no national frontiers... the *ekklesia* ²⁰³

The church is neither natural nor artificial – it is constituted by vocation and election – it is the beloved community – its ultimate constitution is divine and heavenly. It is like Christ its Head, both divine and human, as the Church Triumphant above and the Church Militant below. The Church’s use of ‘body’ language is natively Christian. To Paul, the Church is the mystical Body of Christ (1 Cor 12)²⁰⁴, it has been spoken of as “the extension of the Incarnation”. The Commission affirm the classic *notae ecclesiae* of the creed. The Church has many members, but it is *one*. They insist on the public, historical relevance of this confession:

No words could be of greater significance for world history than these simple phrases, “whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free”²⁰⁵

The unity of the Church is not an ideal, but a reality. It is sacramental in character, signed and sealed by baptism and communion.

The Church is also Catholic: following the Westminster Confession, the report affirms that both the church at large and the individual church are catholic – not just as spread everywhere, but as for everyone.²⁰⁶ Sadly it is also divided in faith and order. The Church is Apostolic – all affirm that even if they diverge on their understanding of the apostolic succession.²⁰⁷ The Church is holy, but not sinless – it is holy as a society of the forgiven and redeemed.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ *ibid.* 430; again this passage is very close to parts of the 1938 Swanwick Lecture and to the final chapter of *Invitation to Pilgrimage*

²⁰⁴ The Commission’s language here resonates with the 1943 Papal Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* and the developing emphasis on the church as the Body of Christ within contemporary Roman Catholic theology.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.* 432

²⁰⁶ *ibid.* 433

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* 434

And it is itself a redeemed society – no mere collection of redeemed individuals, but a society entrance into whose fellowship constitutes the salvation of the individuals composing it....

With Cyprian and Calvin, the Commission affirm that “outside the Church there is no salvation”:

The truth is not that adherence to the Church (still less to one branch of it) is a formal precondition of salvation; the truth is rather that entry into its divine human fellowship is what salvation *means*. A man is saved when he is delivered from that miserable self-centredness, which is the essence of his sinfulness, by being received into a new and liberating life-in-community with Christ and with his fellow-men in Christ – and this life-in-community is precisely what is meant by the Church.²⁰⁹

In an important passage, the Commission²¹⁰ maintains that the Church sets a problem to the world, by its very existence:

Here then was a new community, with an ethos all its own; a community which cut across all existing communities; a ‘third race’ which dwelt only partly upon earth, for which national frontiers and racial barriers and class distinctions were all alike irrelevant and whose Head, to whom it gave total allegiance was divine. The limit set by this absolute claim to such claims as might be made by earthly States and other forms of earthly society was an entirely new challenge to the ancient world. The whole of European history during the last two thousand years may be read as a record of how men have behaved in the face of this challenge; of how earthly States have sought to adjust their claim to Christ’s absolute claim;²¹¹ .. the most significant sociological problems of the last two thousand years are those which have been set for the Western world by the Church’s existence in its midst.²¹²

This remarkable passage is a profound example of the way in which the Baillie Commission articulates a prophetic ecclesiology in response to the challenge of fascism, secularism and communism. It also shows how the ecclesiology proposed by the Commission was integrated with a political theology and a missiology of Western culture, offering a missiological grand narrative of ‘the last two thousand

²⁰⁹ *ibid.* – note the connections here to Baillie’s earlier writing in *Our Knowledge of God* and *Invitation to Pilgrimage*.

²¹⁰ this can only be Baillie in full flight; again the first half of the quotation bears very strong resemblances to the end of *Invitation to Pilgrimage*; the latter half is taken almost verbatim from the beginning of his 1938 Swanwick lecture, with its strong echoes of Troeltsch

²¹¹ The Commission’s (John Baillie’s?) formulation here bears comparison with O’Donovan, 1996, p194: “The claim of Christendom is that of witness.. it attests.. the actual impact of the Christian faith upon European politics and it expounds this impact in its developed political reflections.”

²¹² CoS RGA 1943??;

years'. For Baillie and the Commission, in the midst of a horrific war against States making totalitarian claims, it was a time for bold theological assertions – as the 1942 report had put it, only Christ can drive out demons.²¹³

The 1943 report goes on to consider church membership, emphasising an inclusive stance towards all household members and staunchly defending infant baptism as the substitute for circumcision. Discussing the church of faith and the church as visible institution, the report invokes Augustine against the Donatists and portrays Calvin as recovering this sense of the church as *corpus permixtum* after mediaeval deterioration of this understanding, in his treatment of the church visible and invisible.

The report argues that this understanding safeguards the unity of the church (there are not two churches one visible and the other invisible) without turning the church into an ideal. It cites J.H. Oldham's judgement from the Oxford Conference volumes that there is an inescapable tension between the Church in history and the true Body of Christ:²¹⁴

Oldham: "Within the Church as an organised society the true Church has to be continually recreated".(440)

High doctrines of the church's own nature must be accompanied by zeal for mission to the world. Positively, the twentieth century is the time of the world-wide diffusion of Christianity.

After so long a period of comparative isolation within its own national borders, [the Church of Scotland] has in the course of little more than half a century grown to a consciousness of itself as part of a fellowship of Christian Churches throughout the world.

.....That the Christian Church should now be actually found in practically every part of the world is a fact of the most profound significance for the future of the nations, though it is so often overlooked in contemporary discussions of the forces that are shaping the new age.(442)

²¹³ (1942 Report,556) Oldham's analysis was influential here. I disagree strongly with Graeme Smith's reading of Oxford 1937 and his characterisation of Oldham's theology as 'totalitarian'. see Political Theology vol 3.1 (2001) 32-46.

²¹⁴ *ibid.* 439

We are being forced to see “an interrelatedness of nations which admits of no less parallel than that which Scripture proclaims as the Body of Christ,”²¹⁵ moreover, with respect to the conflicts of global capitalism:

Christians cannot but feel that the reality of the Ecumenical Church is brought to nought if after worshipping together and partaking together of the sacred meal at international gatherings, they are forced to return home to pursue, in the real business of living, their material rivalries.²¹⁶

At the close of the 1945 report, the Commission asks for “a treasuring of past traditions, but also a taking them into the Church of the future, the greater Church for which ‘we’ pray, a reunited Christendom”. This must not weaken and erode the rich diversities of tradition, but it must move beyond mere “ecclesiastical patriotism”:

The present situation is such that only the purblind can now refuse to look beyond the bounds of their own communion....there is now a world situation; and a world situation demands a world church...The threat of a universal secularism can be countered only by the Universal Church. We desire therefore, to record in the strongest possible terms our sense of the duty now laid upon our own Church to throw itself with single-minded zeal into the convergent efforts now being made towards the development of a true ecumenical consciousness throughout the whole Body of Christ.

God's Will For Church and Nation - The Relation Between Church and Scotland and Future Practice

The Baillie Commission were engaged in ‘practical’ ecclesial theology. There is an implicit call for action in their remit – what did God want the church to do? It was one thing to name the crisis of the world and to proclaim the nature of the church and another to give account of how church and nation were to be related. In this

²¹⁵ CoS RGA 1943, 484

²¹⁶ The reference certainly includes the famous closing communion service at Tambaram, attended by Commission Members George MacLeod and A.S.Kydd; on Archie Craig’s memory of this see also Templeton, 1993, 167

final section, I will set out the thinking within the Reports on the nature of this relation.

The Commission were clear the Church must give a lead to the nation, claiming that in the present crisis “nothing is more necessary than the leadership of the Christian Church”.²¹⁷

The first lead the Church had given to the Nation was to approve the war as just and pray for God’s blessing on the nation’s war effort.²¹⁸

A second lead, emphasised by the Commission was the Church’s need to confess its own sins and failings; among them:

a failure to proclaim the Divine condemnation on social evils, or to champion in any costly way the cause of the poor, the oppressed and the workless....A primary and immediate duty of the Church is to set its own house in order.²¹⁹

A third lead was in relation to reconstruction:

the Church is called to proclaim the spirit and principles by which a more Christian world order may be established. In the Providence of God an hour has come when the Church, by its corporate life and witness in the community, may be more effective than ever before in renewing the life of mankind.²²⁰

In the Commission’s view, this could only happen if the Church also led by example in confronting its own divisions:

The present distress should be regarded as a fresh call of God to seek with deeper urgency than ever a closer and more effective concord and co-operation with other Communion in the one Body of Christ... fresh opportunity should be taken to seek and express the spiritual unity of Christ’s people.²²¹

²¹⁷ CoS RGA 1941, 708

²¹⁸ CoS RGA 1941, 706 quoting 1940 Assembly Resolution

²¹⁹ CoS RGA 1941, 709-10

²²⁰ CoS RGA 1941, 709

²²¹ CoS RGA 1941, 710

Methodology

Calls for leadership were well and good, but how far should the church go in offering leadership to society? The 1941 report accepts that:

It is a just demand upon the Church that it substantiate the Christian claim to hold the secret and power of a better order of society by formulating those Christian principles which should be brought to bear upon the grave defects.. of Western civilisation, revealed by the present crisis...it is part of the Christian task in this critical hour to declare the general lines of action to which the Spirit of Christ must lead us and to encourage practical endeavours to that end.²²²

In the 1942 report, we are offered two (related) approaches to the statement and application of Christian principles – the ‘Common Cause’ approach and the “Middle Axiom’ approach.

A section on *The Ideals of Western Civilisation*, directly reproduces the argument from John Baillie’s article that same year in *Christianity and Crisis* entitled *Christianity and the Ideals of the West*.²²³ While Christian ethics are seen as distinctive and irreducible to Western secular ethics (which are fatally weakened by *radical* detachment from their Christian source) a certain *relative* detachment of our social ideals from Christian doctrine and worship may be necessary to create a ‘common cause’ for Christians and non-Christians.

It is not entirely clear that the ‘Middle Axiom’ approach the report moves on to endorse is so very different from this strategy of relative detachment, but in adopting Oldham’s “middle axiom” approach²²⁴, the stated aim has more to do with

²²² CoS RGA 1941, 711-12

²²³ See my previous discussion of this article

²²⁴ Although often associated with William Temple, the term was first coined by Joseph Oldham in his preparatory volume for Oxford 1937, written with W. Visser ‘t Hooft, *The Church and Its Function In Society*, Oldham & Visser ‘t Hooft 1937, 209-210. Here the authors argue that ‘it belongs to the prophetic and teaching office of the Church to expound the implications of the Christian understanding of life’. The key paragraph which coins the term reads:

“Hence, between purely general statements of the ethical demands of the Gospel and the decisions that have to be made in concrete situations there is need for what may be described as middle axioms. It is these that give relevance and point to the Christian ethic. They are an attempt to define the directions in which, in a particular state of society, Christian faith must express itself. They are not binding for all time, but are

extending the reach of the church's social teaching in the social and political realm, than with removing non-Christian objections. In keeping with Oldham's approach, the crucial importance of the laity in applying middle axioms in specific situations is stressed.²²⁵ While accepting that the church *as such* cannot give direct guidance on technical or specialised questions (except where it chooses to support an overwhelming moral or expert case) the report makes a robust "Oxford" type case for the relevance of Christian faith to every social problem and every problem of the civil polity. The modern promotion of disciplinary independence is seen to have overreached itself. Methods must serve ends and ends the Chief End.²²⁶ There is no general formula which governs how specific middle axioms may be, but a rule for their formulation is that the distinction between morality and law must be maintained and applied thoughtfully within a mixed society of Christian and non-Christian.

In respect of the social and industrial life of the nation, the Commission proposes the following middle axiom:

*Economic power must be made objectively responsible to the community as a whole. The possessors of economic power must be answerable for the use of that power, not only to their own consciences, but to appropriate social organs - .. this means .. a much greater measure of direction on the part of the community of the uses to which economic power may be put.*²²⁷

Declaring that "economy as well as polity must be 'of the people, by the people', for the people", the Commission calls for action to address extreme inequality, to promote educational opportunity and ensure a living wage for every citizen.²²⁸ In one of its few direct references to this role, the Commission adds here that "a national church" has a special obligation to consider the present state of the nation

provisional definitions of the type of behaviour required of Christians at a given period and in given circumstances."

²²⁵ CoS RGA 1942, 573; The need for a massive shift of expectations about the laity was one of Oldham's most common themes, and was also a key theme for Maritain. It figured strongly in Moot discussions.

²²⁶ CoS RGA 1942, 565

²²⁷ CoS RGA 1942, 601

²²⁸ CoS RGA 1942, 602

and proposes a more concrete and detailed review of the current economic and social situation in Scotland.²²⁹

The Commission's approach was however, not entirely consistent. It is notable that while it formulates 'middle axioms' in relation to economics in 1942 and 1944²³⁰, it does not do so in 1943 in relation to education or marriage and the family, about which it feels able to offer more direct opinions. For example, the 1943 report maintains that:

A national system of education must embody traditions acceptable to the community as a whole. Totalitarianism does not become respectable by clothing itself in Christian garments.²³¹

We seem set for a 'Common Cause' approach, but we get something rather different. While recognising that 'we cannot expect our schools to be fully Christian', the report argues that schools must be 'animated by a definite Christian purpose'.²³² Dismissing the 'divisive' option of denominational schools, they are also cool about the 'England and Wales' approach involving an agreed syllabus and official promotion of school worship, which is not seen to fit 'our Scottish state system.' Instead, the Commission argues that:

The Presbyterian Churches transferred their schools voluntarily and without charge to the State, on the understanding that religious instruction 'according to use and wont' would be maintained in the schools of Scotland.

The Commission is 'convinced that the interests of a truly Christian education in our Scottish schools can best be promoted by building securely on the foundations already laid. The 'use and wont' approach has allowed a compromise with 'neither Church nor State' having direct control of religious education. It has avoided

²²⁹ CoS RGA 1942, 602

²³⁰ The 1944 Report proposed a still more controversial middle axiom: "The common interest demands a far greater measure of public control of capital resources and the means of production than our tradition has in the past envisaged." CoS RGA 1944, 502

²³¹ CoS RGA 1943, 470

²³² C.f. Maritain's view of the church as the soul/animus of the State. Cavanaugh, Song.

religious controversy and ‘the religious tradition of our Scottish schools has been maintained by popular consent’. Trust between Churches and teachers is strong. It is desirable to maintain ‘the traditional relationship’ between Church and State in Scottish education.

Within this, however, the Commission still looks for “a great strengthening of the position of religion in our schools” in view of the current cultural and spiritual crisis. While the situation in primary schools is ‘satisfactory’, the chief weakness is seen to lie in the secondary school. Many teachers here are hesitant to undertake scripture teaching. The Commission believes that:

Biblical studies should not be regarded merely as a subject comparable with other subjects. These studies should indeed provide a synthesis for the whole life and teaching of the school.

An enhanced programme of in-service training is needed to ensure teachers are able to undertake this task. Nor is this teaching a substitute for school worship:

Nothing can take the place of a common act of worship at the beginning of the school day as a means of relating the whole life and purpose of the school to God as the author and sustainer of all life.(473)

The report insists that there is “a distinctive Christian contribution to educational theory and practice” and this should be represented within the national system. Many modern educational developments are inspired by Christian values. This needs to be set against the widespread influence on the curriculum of 19th secular thought, particularly in the area of history, which needs to be exposed and responded to. Education is of crucial strategic importance in moving beyond the current crisis and seeking the spiritual renewal of modern society.

Brief mention is made of the nascent Youth Service, alongwith concern that state initiatives here are aiming only at religious neutrality, which leads to a call for Christian involvement in the development of the service. Ultimately, we are told, the

community is the most potent educator and only when it has been reawakened to a living Christian faith will the deepest educational needs be met.

I have explored this 1943 section on education at some length because it seems to me to offer an important example of a third Commission approach to the relation between Church and Society alongside the two discussed above. It is perhaps more of a 'Maritainian' or New Christendom approach, which aspires to what we might call an 'open Christian hegemony'. In the form we meet it here, it represents a peculiarly Scottish and Presbyterian form of erastianism, based not on law but on "use and wont". It is, if you like, a pragmatic majoritarian approach to the state on the part of a dominant group. While accepting that state schools cannot be "fully Christian" – the Commission wants them to be as Christian as society will allow.

'The Conclusion of the Whole'

The Commission offers some final reflections on its approach at the close of their final 1945 report. Will their work lead to action?

They explain that the greater part of their reports has been devoted to "clarification of the Church's message in its special relevance and application to the contemporary scene". They have declared what they think the Church's attitude should be towards a number of problems and have tried to define the appropriate Christian line of action in all these fields:

In none of these fields does the Church as such possess or desire to possess, legislative power; and in none of them has the Commission asked the General Assembly to take any action other than to commend our conclusions to the serious consideration of the Church's membership. The action here called for is the action of Christian individuals in their individual rights of citizenship and the use of such influence as they severally possess in the leavening of general society.(479/80)

The Commission are emphatic that they do not seek a 'Christian totalitarianism', and their final response to the challenge of influencing society strikes a characteristic ecclesiological note:

.. far from regretting that we live in an era of complete liberty of opinion, we cordially rejoice in it, holding it to be a rightful, if belated embodiment of essential Christian principle. Our regret and deep-seated penitence must rather be that the Church has not yet succeeded in exhibiting the Christian revelation in such a way as to convince the men of our time of its ability to solve the many interrelated problems of modern thought and modern community life.

The Commission in Recent Scholarship

The work of the Baillie Commission was given renewed scholarly attention in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s. The centenaries of the births of John and Donald were marked by conferences in Edinburgh and St Andrews in 1986-7 which led to the publication in 1993 of a substantial volume of essays on the Baillie brothers: *Christ, Church and Society* edited by David Fergusson, then Professor of Systematic Theology in Aberdeen. In the interim, Will Storrar had drawn attention to the Baillie Commission in his 1990 *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision*, a reference which would later be cited by Beveridge and Turnbull in their iconoclastic essays in *Scottish Studies, Scotland After Enlightenment*.²³³

The fiftieth anniversary of the Baillie Commission was marked by a colloquium in January 1994, organised by CTPI and the Committee on Church and Nation of the Church of Scotland, papers from which were published as CTPI Occasional Paper No 31: *God's Will In A Time of Crisis*. David Fergusson also edited a collection of writings by the Baillie brothers, published in 1997 as *John and Donald Baillie: Selected Writings*. George Newlands, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow subsequently produced what is likely to remain the definitive biographical study with *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology*, published in 2002.

The concensus among these scholars about the work of the Baillie Commission was almost wholly positive. Most obviously with Will Storrar, but also for many of the other scholars involved, their work on the Baillies represented an act of cultural retrieval which can be understood within a postmodern cultural politics of the Scottish academy. From the 1980s, a growing postmodern suspicion of universal

²³³ Beveridge, C. & Turnbull, R. 1997, 114

and “untraditioned” theology fuelled a desire among academic theologians to revisit ‘local’ theologies, which could be claimed as Scottish without appearing trapped in parochialism. The Baillies fitted the moment perfectly – they were Scottish (Highland even!) theologians, who resisted an oppressive narrative of Scottish Christian identity in one decade and reconfigured that narrative in the next decade, in opposition to totalitarianisms of the right and the left. They resisted the standard left-right theological stand offs – Fergusson dubs Baillie an “orthodox liberal” and were admired by both evangelicals/Barthians and liberals/Bultmannians. They were politically committed but could also be appreciated as spiritual directors, pastoral mentors and, of course, as preachers. The assessments of their significance were mostly glowing. Here I am only concerned with conclusions about the work of the Baillie Commission rather than broader questions about their so-often strangely twinned legacies as theologians.

What were the verdicts? One of the earliest comes from Donald Smith’s important 1987 study of social criticism in the Scottish Church 1830-1945, in which the Baillie Commission is made the redemptive conclusion to his narrative:

..the social thought contained in these Reports.. was the culmination of the long development and reawakening of social criticism in the Scottish Church....
The wise lead which the Church of Scotland gave to the nation on those critical issues which came to light during the War, together with the enlightened attitude which it adopted towards the comprehensive social welfare schemes which were drafted during these years, made it possible for it to play a significant role in easing the transition to social democracy after 1945. It is not too much to say that by its vigorous pronouncements and activity in the war years, the Scottish Church helped pave the way for that orderly transformation in social and economic life which was the mark of the immediate post-war period.²³⁴

Alec Cheyne speaks of “a series of searching and wide-ranging reports which marked a kind of high-water mark in the social thought of twentieth-century Scottish Christianity”.²³⁵ He claims that “the stance adopted by the Commission helped not a little to bring about the almost seismic shift which took place in the

²³⁴ Smith 1987, 374

²³⁵ in Fergusson ed. 1993, 182

social thinking of this country” leading through Beveridge to the NHS and the welfare state.²³⁶ Even more strongly, “the modern world has not seen very many instances of Christian leaders giving more strenuous – and influential – thought to social and economic problems than was given by the Baillie Commission in the period between 1940 and 1945”.²³⁷

Cheyne, perhaps more than any other recent commentator, highlights the overall quality of the ecclesiological thinking in the 1943 report:

Seekers for a concise yet comprehensive account of the doctrine of the Church which underlay the Baillies’ life’s work [again this twinning] can hardly do better than turn to the pronouncements of the Commission.. its 1943 report republished three years later under the heading ‘*The Church of Christ – Its True Nature and Its Universal Mission*’.²³⁸

The report says Cheyne, with its/John’s “clarity of thought and incisiveness of judgement in almost every phrase” was able to look with an “affectionate yet critical eye” on the Church of Scotland, combining “unapologetic admiration” for the Church of Scotland/Presbyterianism with a passionate commitment to ecumenism.²³⁹

Duncan Forrester draws attention to the ‘prophetic’ character of the Commission’s ecclesiology:

.. I would want to argue that John Baillie, through the work of the Baillie Commission, developed a theology which affirmed that the church, in its being as well as in its statements, was called to be prophetic and rejected by implication the common suggestion that only individuals can be prophetic.²⁴⁰

Baillie’s influence was “paramount”, the method of the commission was “pioneering”:

²³⁶ *ibid.* 185

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ *ibid.*

²³⁹ *ibid.* 186, 188, 190

²⁴⁰ *ibid.* 224

The Baillie Commission espoused the middle axiom approach, gave it a distinctive interpretation and produced one of the very best instances of this way of relating to public affairs and doing social ethics.... one of the small number of really distinguished examples of the middle axiom approach.²⁴¹

He concludes that the Commission showed “exemplary theological seriousness”. The willingness of the Assembly to adopt its reports meant that “the Church of Scotland officially committed itself to the need for a new social and economic order”. He, like Cheyne, is convinced that “it had considerable impact on public opinion throughout Britain”, that like the Beveridge Report “it shaped and fed the public’s expectations” and in its case “strongly influenced *Christian* opinion in favour of radical social change and provided a well-thought out theological and ethical undergirding for post-war reconstruction”.²⁴²

For Forrester, Baillie is (though seldom so recognised) “a social theologian of real eminence” and “the legacy of the Baillie Commission has been too much neglected in Scotland”.²⁴³ In its work we see “a high point in the social awareness of the Church of Scotland and its reports remain something of a classic in Christian social ethics”.²⁴⁴ James Whyte calls it “the most important church commission this [20th] century”.²⁴⁵

Will Storrar is ardent though not uncritical in his assessment. The Baillie Commission was “a turning point in the life of the modern Kirk, part of a sea-change” in war-time British social thought. It “saved the Church of Scotland from itself and for the Gospel”, it liberated the Kirk from the false vision of the interwar years and brought it “intellectually and theologically into its own time”.²⁴⁶ It showed “remarkable perception” in reading the signs of the times.²⁴⁷ Storrar also makes the bold claim that:

²⁴¹ *ibid.* 229, 231

²⁴² *ibid.* 232

²⁴³ *ibid.* 233

²⁴⁴ Wright and Badcock ed. 1996 266

²⁴⁵ Fergusson ed. 1993 235

²⁴⁶ Morton ed. 1994, 60

²⁴⁷ *ibid.* 62

To see the enduring legacy of the BC, my own generation need look no further than the church, society and social experience of our own childhood and youth.... relatively full churches and Sunday Schools... within the post-war Kirk...a Reformed faith that maintained a natural engagement with rather than estrangement from the challenges, problems and opportunities of the modern world.²⁴⁸

Storrar makes the strong claim that the Commission had a “fundamental and enduring legacy” in helping to create a thirty year period of enhanced material and spiritual well-being enjoyed by Scotland in the post-war period. It “constructed [a] Christian social imagination and had it adopted as the official church policy of the General Assembly”. Substantively, its axioms about economic accountability and limited sovereignty are commended by Storrar as of continuing relevance to the crises of our time (1994).²⁴⁹ If Storrar is the most fulsome in his praise of the Commission’s work, he is also the most directly critical. Despite its prescience in diagnosing ‘postmodern’ problems, its “imperialist” solutions “remained wedded to a form of the old Constantinian settlement”. Its methodology was “elitist, male-dominated, top-down and non-participatory” – its theology was done from above.²⁵⁰ In the end though, its work, done in the course of a paradigm shift from ‘Christian’ to a ‘pluralist’ social formation, exceeded all expectations. “It was a moment of grace.”²⁵¹

Andrew McLellan claimed in 1994 that the Church and Nation Committee stood “in a direct line of inheritance from the Baillie Commission” and in an interesting move, reserved some of the credit other contributors to the 1994 colloquium afford the Commission, for the work and influence of the Iona Community.²⁵² However, both his contribution and that of Norman Shanks resist or deflect the suggestion of Duncan Forrester that present-day Kirk and ecumenical reports lack the theological

²⁴⁸ *ibid.* 62, 63

²⁴⁹ *ibid.* 63

²⁵⁰ *ibid.* 70

²⁵¹ *ibid.* 72

²⁵² *ibid.* 73

rigour and coherence of the Baillie Commission²⁵³, arguing that only centres such as CTPI can aspire to this.²⁵⁴

Conclusion

Christopher Harvie has suggested that Churchill's support in February 1941 for Tom Johnston's Council of State on Post-War Problems "produced at last the political correlate of the Scottish Renaissance".²⁵⁵ It could be argued that in the Baillie Commission, Scotland also gained its theological correlate. In his contribution to the 1994 CTPI/Church & Nation colloquium, David Fergusson mused on what John Baillie would think "if he were still alive and reading Hauerwas in an eventide home in Morningside at the age of 107?"²⁵⁶ The question might of course, be posed the other way round. What would Hauerwas make of the work of the Baillie Commission?

He would, I suggest be immediately suspicious because of Baillie's closeness to and admiration for Reinhold Niebuhr and argue that Baillie's criticisms of Niebuhr do not go nearly far enough. However, I think he would be deeply sympathetic to Baillie's critique of liberalism and liberal ideals and he would give him great credit for the richness of his ecclesiology – a notable feature of Baillie's thought which many have claimed is notably absent from Niebuhr's. Above all, he would disagree profoundly with Baillie's unflinching support for the war. It is interesting and perhaps revealing, that none of the papers in the 1987 and 1994 Baillie conferences were at all critical of John Baillie in this respect. (Nor were any of them by women, despite their criticisms of the Baillie commission for this failing!) A decade on from that colloquium and conscious of the very high quality of the papers produced for it, the legacy of the Baillie Commission continues to invite further reflection within Scotland. For one thing, ecclesiology has returned to centre stage in contemporary theological discussion – in part through the influence of Hauerwas, but also in

²⁵³ Shanks refers to Forrester's 1993 article in Scottish Affairs No 4. pp67-82 *The Church of Scotland and Public Policy*

²⁵⁴ *ibid.* pp73-79

²⁵⁵ Harvie 2002, 197

²⁵⁶ Morton ed. 1994, 42

response to the work of John Milbank and the debates over Radical Orthodoxy. One sign of this has been the WCC study programme on *Ecclesiology and Ethics* during the 1990s and the publications arising from it by Duncan Forrester and Lewis Mudge among others. Another major theological landmark has been the publication in 1996 of Oliver O'Donovan's *The Desire of the Nations*, which has reignited debates about the meaning of Christendom and the relation of ecclesiology and missiology to political theology. The scale of O'Donovan's thinking (and of Milbank's) would have appealed to Baillie and there are significant points of convergence in both their concerns and their conclusions.

Closer to home, since the colloquium we have also witnessed Callum Brown's thesis on *The Death of Christian Britain*, in which his focus on the relative strength (until around the time of John Baillie's death) and precipitous decline of 'discursive Christianity' in Scotland offers another light on whether Baillie overestimated the extent of diffusive (discursive?) Christianity on Scotland, or whether something dramatic and sudden happened which led to its eclipse.

These are issues we will return to in the final chapter of the thesis. The next chapter belongs to one of Baillie's students and to one of his passions – Ian Fraser and the work of ecumenism carried out at Scottish Churches House in the 1960s.

Chapter Three – Ian Fraser and Scottish Churches House

This second historical section focuses on the figure of Rev Dr Ian Fraser and the work of Scottish Churches House in Dunblane in the period 1960-1969 when he was Warden.¹ Research for the chapter has included two interviews with Ian Fraser as well as study of his published theological work. The ‘hindsight’ factor present in Fraser’s later accounts of this period - the homespun 1969 manuscript volume *People Journeying* and its reworked and more polished incarnation in *Ecumenical Adventure* (2002) – has been checked by comparing these accounts with original contemporary documents from the archives of Scottish Churches House.²

In this chapter I follow the pattern of the previous one, beginning with a biographical sketch of Ian Fraser’s life before describing the historical context in Scottish ecumenism for the creation of Scottish Churches’ House in 1960. I then consider the theological accounts of world, church and the church-world relation which formed and were re-formed by Ian Fraser’s work at the House during the 1960s. Finally, I offer a more direct reflection on how insights from Hauerwas can be used to critique the practice of theology within Fraser’s and the House’s work.

Biographical Background to Ian Fraser’s Work at Scottish Churches House

Ian Masson Fraser was born on December 15th 1917 in Forres, where his father ran a butcher’s shop. As a boy, his father became blind and Ian worked in the back shop in his spare time, gaining his first experience of mixing with workers from a poorer background than his own. He was educated at Forres Academy and went to Edinburgh University in 1935 where he soon became involved with

¹ It is a great resource for this chapter that Ian Fraser generously made himself available on several occasions for interview and comment.

² After Ian Fraser wrote *Ecumenical Adventure* in 2002, his account of Scottish Churches’ House in the 1960s, all the archival material from that period was deposited with the librarian of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at New College in the University of Edinburgh. Due to other demands and lack of resources, none of the material had been sorted or indexed by Spring 2005, when I gained access to them and the size of the archive far exceeds the scope of a single thesis chapter. However, I have been able to consult the relevant house files for all the consultations referred to in this chapter. I am grateful to Margaret Acton of CSCNWW for her kind assistance with access to these papers.

the highly active Student Christian Movement and in 1937 experienced what he calls not a 'church' but a 'kingdom conversion' through which he was simultaneously theologically and politically radicalised.³ While there were radical modernist theological currents within it, the SCM of this period was characterised more generally by its combination of a broad theological orthodoxy, a vigorous internationalism and growing anti-colonialism, socialist political sympathies, passionate ecumenism and a positive attitude towards the arts and liberal culture.⁴ This was the broad spectrum of values and ideals into which Ian Fraser was 'converted' and from which he never departed in the subsequent six decades.

Following his MA, he went to New College in 1939 to train for the Church of Scotland ministry. While at New College he was profoundly influenced by John Baillie, whose relationship to him he describes as 'more like uncle-nephew than teacher-student'.⁵ Other key influences included his time in the New College Settlement in Pleasance, working under the Professor of Practical Theology W.S. Tindal⁶ and his recruitment by Rev George MacLeod to join the youthful Iona Community.⁷

Fraser was marked out by his teachers for an academic career⁸, but instead of following a distinguished BD with doctoral study, in 1942 he secured the backing of the Church of Scotland Home Board and the Iona Community for the then highly unusual step of entering a pioneering ministry in 'Industry', as a worker-minister⁹ in the Tullis Russell paper mill in Markinch. He was not (and

³ Interview One with Ian Fraser 23.6.04 Gargunnock – He attributes his "politicisation" directly to his conversion and his subsequent formation within the SCM and its Study Groups.

⁴ On the SCM in Scotland between the 1920s and the 1940s, see especially Blackie 1995, Newbigin 1993, Templeton 1991.

⁵ Interview One with Ian Fraser

⁶ see the privately published memoir on Tindal's life in New College Library; Fraser says that while Tindal did not have Baillie's "stature" he always encouraged his social and political involvement. (Interview 1 with Ian Fraser)

⁷ Fraser says that MacLeod was made aware of his academic achievement and sought him out at New College to join what was then still a relatively small group of Community Members.

⁸ New College lore had it that his teachers believed he should spend 3 years in a parish, before making his way to the chair in Practical Theology at New College via the Practical Theology posts at Aberdeen and St Andrews. (Glasgow did not figure in their calculations!) (Interview 1 with Ian Fraser)

⁹ The observation is made by Fraser and others that this anticipated the French Worker-Priest movement by a number of years. He also notes that it was initially opposed by George MacLeod who felt that Community Members should be concentrating on work in Church Extension charges. (Interview I

never has been) a pacifist, but the ministry had been declared a reserved occupation, exempt from conscription.¹⁰ As other men of his generation made huge sacrifices in the armed forces, Fraser's move to a low paid job in industry can be seen as an attempt to exercise his calling in an 'unreserved' way. It was also, at the time when the Baillie commission was meeting, a different attempt to find a new articulation of the social and political responsibility of theology.¹¹ In a 1943 defence of his decision, which in its heightened rhetorical style suggests the influence of George MacLeod, Fraser declared:

This is not the rejection of ministry, but the search for authentic ministry. This is not a rejection of theology but a search for a relevant theology. This is not a rejection of scholarship but its completion.

This association of his decision for "Industry"¹² with the search for authenticity and relevance and the reference to 'completing' scholarship offers an early insight into what would be Fraser's enduring ambivalence about the academy and his sense of its potential remoteness from the needs of the churches and of the masses. The actual period of time spent 'in industry' was only two years and Fraser then moved into the job of SCM Scottish Secretary, which had been such a rich training ground for future ecumenical leaders¹³ and was a more conventional option for a young man in his position, whose ability and initiative was already clear to the generation above him.

Fraser's four years working for SCM spanned the end of the war, the Labour landslide, the birth of the Welfare State and the creation of the World Council of Churches. All of these were decisive and formative influences upon him. In

with Ian Fraser) While clearly an extraordinary and even prophetic move, its significance and impact in Scotland was lessened by the fact that Fraser only stayed in this role for two years.

¹⁰ Fraser consulted personnel associated with the Armed Forces at Edinburgh University as to their view on the ministry being declared a reserved occupation. The feedback he received was that there was support for this as trained ministers would be needed in the post-war period. (Interview 1 Ian Fraser)

¹¹ Intriguingly, he tells the story of being asked by John Baillie, who was worried about the style of the Commission reports, to redraft sections of them in a more accessible form. His attempts to do this and Baillie's action in asking someone outside the Commission to do this did not find favour with Commission members and nothing came of it. (Interview 1 with Ian Fraser)

¹² A further study could be done simply on the way in which this concept is "reified" and to an extent both romanticised and mythologised in UK church thinking during this period. Most often spoken of as the singular aggregation "industry" it carried a powerful emotional charge and still does for some today e.g. in relation to the defence of Industrial Chaplaincy within the Church of Scotland.

¹³ His predecessors in the post included Robert Mackie, Lesslie Newbiggin and Ronald Preston

1948, he accepted a call to become Parish Minister in the Fife dockyard town of Rosyth. At his induction, the charge was given by his teacher and mentor, the Very Rev Professor John Baillie.¹⁴

Fraser's first work in print appeared in the wartime *Christian Newsletter*, but his first major published theological writing appeared in the (then fledgling) *Scottish Journal of Theology* for 1949. Entitled "Theology and Action" the article makes a bold plea for the "incarnational" integration of theology and action, without either being subordinated to the other. Fraser argues that theology cannot be timeless and must be contemporary, it must understand that "our own age is a gift from God" and accept the age as "a channel of revelation".¹⁵ This article offers an important link to the Oxford/Baillie inheritance in its (guarded) appeal to the language of "middle axioms":

The concept of "middle axioms" seeks to do justice both to the biblical record and to the particular needs of our time. It does not separate them to lay emphasis on the one or the other. It seeks to hold them in fruitful tension. The concept carries with it both safety and danger. Its safety lies in its firm belief that the gospel is redemptive for our times, that we must accept the tension of being in our age, colonists of heaven. Its danger lies in the temptation to substitute for action itself, the carefully worded definition of right action.¹⁶

The article also carries a critical reference to the legacy of the Baillie Commission in his comment that:

Committees may get a vision of God's redemptive purpose for a palsied age and bury the vision decently in the formulae of their report. No hand may be stretched out to heal.¹⁷

Fraser argues for the primacy of 'biblical social action', stressing that the church can and should initiate this. He proposes what could be called a dialogical action oriented hermeneutic. Christian action may originate either in a God given concern for "some disease of common life" which is then related to the bible or it may be prompted by biblical insights which are then related to the

¹⁴ Interview One, Ian Fraser

¹⁵ Fraser 1949, 418

¹⁶ Fraser, 1949, 419

¹⁷ Fraser 1949, 419

contemporary situation. Either way, thorough and prayerful study of ‘the problem’ as well as of the Bible is called for. Every correlation of situation and scripture must lead to action and every action must be subject to reflection and must lead on to further action:

In Scotland, the Christian Workers League¹⁸ has pioneered group action of this kind. Christian Action Youth groups now use the same method. Biblical action of this nature should not stand as an offence to theology, but should nourish theology.¹⁹

The article closes with a critique of the middle-class nature of the academy and the ministry, warning that theological work may be distorted by class perspectives and stressing the gap between the language of theology and the language of the people.²⁰ Nevertheless, prophetic action needs the insight and the critical control of the ‘prophet theologian’. The final flourish is a quote from A.D. Lindsay’s introduction to *Das Kapital*, arguing that the untidiness of original thinkers is needed by theological movements.²¹

For an article written in 1949, this is striking in the self-consciousness of its attempt to recast theological method and biblical hermeneutics in relation to social action. It anticipates the methodological approach of liberation theology and liberation hermeneutics by two decades and shows Fraser aged 32 to be a radical theologian whose approach posed a forthright challenge to the language and style of the post-war Scottish divinity halls.

As Parish Minister in Rosyth, Fraser embarked on a distinctive and radical ministry which was evangelical, ecumenical, political and party-political – combining a strong focus on the bible, a radical commitment to lay theology and ministry, active engagement in parish mission, vigorous ecumenical co-operation, local political involvement (he served on Dunfermline Town Council as a Labour councillor) and international awareness. It was a combination which, though achieved at no little cost, seemed to Fraser then and since to be

¹⁸ An association for industrial workers set up by the Iona Community.

¹⁹ Fraser 1949, 420

²⁰ Fraser 1949, 421

²¹ Fraser 1949, 422

'theologically obvious' if the wholeness of the Christian faith were to be lived by a congregation. In his account of the Rosyth years, he wrote that:

To those who know it, that commonalty of experiment, shared experience and fellowship which makes up the Iona Community, in my own Church of Scotland, will be seen to have provided much of the backing from which the particular local pattern has emerged. I acknowledge a great debt to it.²²

During this period, Fraser became involved in the interdenominational *Tell Scotland* movement to promote mission within Scotland and in the conversations and controversies about the nature of mission which attached to that movement. Further evidence of his massive and punishing capacity for work can be seen in his undertaking and completing a part-time PhD within three years while at Rosyth, on the social and religious thought of the colourful Scottish Socialist pioneer, MP and founding president of the Scottish Labour Party, R.B. Cunninghame Graham.²³ During the 1950s, he continued to return to New College as a guest lecturer within the Practical Theology programme. He was also active within the ecumenical movement in Scotland, particularly in *Tell Scotland* working groups and at conferences of the Scottish Churches Ecumenical Association. His reflection on the Rosyth ministry was published by SCM in 1959 under the title *Bible, Congregation, Community*. In this year, he and his wife Margaret were approached by Robert Mackie, on behalf of the Scottish Churches Ecumenical Committee, to oversee the establishment of a new ecumenical centre in Dunblane. He took up this appointment in 1960 and moved to Dunblane with his family in November of that year.²⁴ John Baillie was one of the founding trustees of the House and his name appeared on the early literature. Following Baillie's death in 1960, the library room in Scottish Churches House was later designated the John Baillie Reading Room in his memory. Ian

²² Fraser 1959, 8

²³ His PhD on R. Cunningham Grahame: His Social and Religious Outlook was awarded by the University of Edinburgh in 1956. Fraser's interest may have been fuelled by the earlier publication by Hugh MacDiarmid [C. M. Grieve] of *Cunninghame Graham: a centenary study* [1952] The PhD itself was never published although it formed the basis for his book *Cunninghame Graham: Fighter for Justice*, published privately in 2002.

²⁴ Oral sources indicate that Fraser was considered for, but never offered at least one chair in Practical Theology in Scotland. Whether such an offer from within Scotland (as opposed to one which came from Canada in 1959) would have proved irresistible is a matter for speculation, but in the absence of such an offer it is possible that Fraser's vision for SCH represented at least in part a spirited rationalisation of a certain sense of rejection by the academy.

Fraser worked as Warden of Scottish Churches House until 1969, when he left Scotland to work for the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

The Ecumenical Background to Scottish Churches House:

Ecumenism in Scotland 1945-1960

The previous chapter charted the way in which the work of the Student Christian Movement and the influence of figures such as John Baillie and George MacLeod had promoted the cause of ecumenism in Scotland in the period to 1945. The institutional lineage of Scottish ecumenism is usually traced from the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and the Missionary Continuation Committee for Scotland which dates from that year. This was incorporated into the Scottish Churches Council (Mark 1) in 1924, which met quarterly until 1948, when it was voluntarily dissolved in favour of a new Scottish Churches Ecumenical Committee, which also incorporated the Scottish Committee of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches.²⁵

In an undated piece from the 1960s, reflecting on the origins of Scottish Churches' House, Ian Fraser wrote that:

In my judgment the beginning was the formation of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 and the dismay of the Scottish representatives of the different co-operating Churches finding the Churches coming together on a world scale while they were remaining still substantially separated in their home land. Out of this concern came the SCEC and the SCEA.²⁶

The SCEA (Scottish Churches Ecumenical Association) was also set up in 1948 by ecumenical activists including John Baillie (recently installed as a founding President of the WCC) Donald Baillie, Isabel Forrester and others to offer a 'movement' type association which individuals could join, in addition to the SCEC, which was a more formal structure aimed at denominational co-operation.²⁷ In 1950, SCEA merged with another important ecumenical ginger group known as the Dollarbeg group, which had been running annual

²⁵ Small 1964, 2.

²⁶ p5 in Draft for a Book of the House [undated TS 14pp by Ian M Fraser] SCH Archive, New College; parallel passage in Fraser 1969a *PJ* 171

²⁷ Fraser calls it SCEC's "freelance brother". Fraser 1969a, *PJ*, 171

conferences since 1945.²⁸ The membership of SCEC, Dollarbeg and SCEA were the ecumenical vanguard within Scotland in this period, with many of those involved also sharing membership of or close links to the Iona Community and almost all being '*alumni*' of the SCM.²⁹

The 1950s was a remarkable and in some senses, a 'golden' period for the churches in Scotland and initially at least, for ecumenism. In the aftermath of war, Scottish society was caught up in a decade of social, political, economic, cultural and ecclesial 'reconstruction'.³⁰ The vision of the Baillie Commission had included a new drive to evangelise Scotland, which it had related to a grand ecumenical vision of the reconstruction of Scottish society in which a growing and uniting church would exercise a decisive influence across all areas of life.

The history of the protestant denominations in 1950s Scotland and of the Church of Scotland as foremost among them, was to exemplify the difficulties of living out the Baillie vision in practice. As the decade developed, the 'orthodox liberalism' which John Baillie himself personified, began to polarise in favour of one or the other of those tendencies. In this respect, Scotland was also taking part in a wider theological shift. Writing in 1970, in a WCC official volume of historical essays, David Edwards looked back on the radicalism of the previous years and focused on "the sign of Strasbourg". He drew a contrast between the WSCF leadership [of the 1950s] with D.T. Niles as Chair and Philippe Maury as General Secretary, which believed that an "ecumenical consensus" had emerged about the revealed nature of the gospel and the missionary nature of the Church. Edwards described how their desire to educate students in "the dynamic simplicity of this theological consensus" was almost drowned out by the cries of a revolutionary world as they were to be heard at Rangoon in 1958

²⁸ The Dollarbeg group was particularly important because of the leading role taken by women in organising and programming its activities. See Small 1964 and also Leslie Orr's DNB article on "Isabel Forrester".

²⁹ At this stage women could not become members of the Iona Community.

³⁰ c.f. Finlay 2004 pp198ff. Finlay's chapter on the 1945-54 period bears the one word title "Reconstruction"

and Strasbourg in 1960.³¹ His characterisation of these broader theological trends resonates with the situation in 1950s Scotland.

This was the period in recent Scottish church history when church order was most clearly understood as a missiological question and most strongly claimed as a prototype for 'world' order. The ecclesiology of the Baillie commission was an early example of the dynamic simplicity of Niles and Maury's "ecumenical consensus" and Lesslie Newbigin's 1952 Kerr Lectures at Glasgow University, *The Household of God* (1952) a further outstanding articulation of that synthesis.³² In 1950s Scotland, the group of influential church leaders and theologians who, for all their differences from one another, stood within that ecumenical consensus included at least Tom Allan, John Baillie, Donald Baillie, Archie Craig, Neville Davidson, Isabel Forrester, J. Hutchinson-Cockburn, Robert Mackie, George MacLeod, Ralph Morton, Lesslie Newbigin³³, J.S. Stewart, and T.F. Torrance. It included too, those like Ian Fraser, who were more politically radical than most, but whose theology remained orthodox and missionary.

The hopes for what that consensus might achieve in Scotland were to be frustrated in two main areas. In relation to mission, the '*Tell Scotland*' movement founded in 1952, despite notable achievements, was to struggle for a decade (1954-1964) to hold its evangelical and ecumenical constituencies together, with the 1955 Billy Graham Crusade a particular source of controversy and disagreement. In the area of church order, despite the widespread endorsement of the Lund formula in 1952³⁴ and remarkable waves of enthusiasm in response to the 1954 Evanston Assembly of the WCC, the primary ecumenical task

³¹ Fey ed. 1970 400; Note also that a comparison can be made here with the work of Lesslie Newbigin – one of the keynote speakers at Strasbourg (alongwith Barth, Niles, Hooft) and an exemplar of this consensus which in a sense "goes underground" from this period and resurfaces in 1984? with Foolishness to the Greeks. He moves from being fairly unfashionable – in the Niles/Maury mould identified here to being hailed as a prophet when the WCC publish *The Other Side of 1984* in 1983.

³² George Lindbeck names them as among the most important works on ecclesiology in the twentieth century.

³³ Newbigin was in India during much of this time, but his previous status as a Church of Scotland missionary and Scottish SCM Secretary, meant that he remained a frequent visitor and influential commentator on things Scottish in the 1950s. He was, for example, in the Gallery at the 1959 Assembly for the debate on the Bishop's Report.

³⁴ The 1952 Faith and Order Conference at Lund encouraged churches to act on the principles of only doing separately what they could not do together. It was officially accepted by the Church of Scotland as a guiding ecumenical principle.

undertaken by the British churches proved impossible to carry through. High level conversations between Presbyterians and Anglicans led to the so-called 'Bishops' report of 1957³⁵, produced unanimously by a Church of Scotland committee that included John Baillie, Archie Craig and T.F. Torrance and rejected narrowly by the 1959 General Assembly as undermining the catholic credentials of the Church of Scotland in the year before it was due to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Reformation in Scotland. As *Tell Scotland* fragmented and the flagship ecumenical project sank, the reformed churches in Scotland were unwittingly moving past the high-water marks of church membership and ecumenical enthusiasm in the twentieth century.

In place of a globally significant ecumenical union within 'the household of God' advocates of ecumenism within Scotland had to settle for a row of cottages in Dunblane, where they could construct a more modest project for co-operation between the main non-Roman Catholic denominations in Scotland.

Scottish Churches' House was therefore born at an uneasy moment for the Scottish churches; the wave which carried it forward, the dynamic of the first ecumenical generation, was already breaking and its energy being dispersed into divergent theological movements. The Student Christian Movement which had shaped a whole generation of ecumenical activists and leaders, was about to begin an extraordinary plunge into marginality.³⁶ The International Missionary Council was about to merge with the World Council of Churches and become entangled in a global debate about how, in a post-colonial world, to reconcile new theologies of liberation and social reform with older theologies of evangelisation.

As the founding documents for Scottish Churches House were drawn up, the ecumenical veteran Archie Craig, deeply disappointed by the fate of the

³⁵ So-called because while it denied the theological necessity of episcopacy, it argued that it was agreeable to scripture and should be accepted in a modified form as a basis for union between Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches within Britain.

³⁶ See further Ronald H. Preston "The Student Christian Movement and the Critique of Universities" ch 7 and David Edwards "Then and Now" ch 9 both in Reeves ed. 1999

Anglican-Presbyterian conversations, expressed the conviction that the work of the House faced:

A great chance and duty here in view of the legacy left by the Joint Report. So far as the Church of Scotland is concerned, it should be noted that in its 1959 deliverance, the General Assembly ruled that “the ultimate goal of efforts towards unity ought to be the attainment of a single united national Church”. But much work of education remains to be done before this is accepted by the rank and file of the Church even as the “ultimate goal”.³⁷

The archives of Scottish Churches House for the years 1959-1961 reveal a further area of concern felt by those associated with the SCEC and the SCEA, about the impact the churches were felt to be making upon Scottish society. The poorer sections of Scotland’s population had undergone a massive collective ‘fitting’ during the 1950s with a huge programme of slum clearance and rehousing in new-build council schemes, affecting around one third of the total population. The Church of Scotland had responded vigorously to this challenge with a post-war programme of church extension, which had placed a heavy drain on the church’s resources of effort and money.³⁸ It had also, through its Church & Nation committee (restored to visibility after being somewhat eclipsed by the Baillie Commission) contributed a significant stream of critical thinking and commentary on the post-war reconstruction of Scotland, the development of the welfare state and the planning of new housing areas. In the latter half of the 1950s, however, prominent figures in the Church of Scotland who were aware of developments in church life in other European countries, felt concerned that the church in Scotland was failing to develop its public influence in the way sister Reformed churches on the Continent had.

Of those involved in the establishment of Scottish Churches House, Robert Mackie – formerly of the SCM, WSCF and WCC had an unrivalled knowledge of ecumenical developments within Europe.³⁹ Archie Craig, as the first General

³⁷ SCH Archive, New College, Early Ideas File – Undated TS “SCH – Aims and Policy (A provisional statement by Dr A.C. Craig, Chairman of the Programme Committee) based on discussions among an informal group which has met since the last meeting of the full committee”.

³⁸ Just as John White had championed the cause of Church extension in the pre-war period, George MacLeod became a major champion in the 1950s, especially during his own Moderatorial year of 1958.

³⁹ See the biography of Robert Mackie by Nansie Blackie, *In Love and In Laughter*, Blackie 1995

Secretary of the British Council of Churches had been closely involved in planning the BCC's Religion and Life weeks which had pioneered a new approach to ecumenical mission and church renewal, through activities in local settings which aimed to explore and demonstrate the relevance of Christianity to all dimensions of life.⁴⁰ Isabel Forrester had been a leading figure in the Dollarbeg group, which had acted as an ecumenical 'think tank' in the post war years.

The joint SCEC/SCEA plan to establish a 'house' for the Scottish Churches clearly owed much to the model of the 'evangelical academy' developed in Germany and Holland after the Second World War.⁴¹ The attractiveness of this 'Reformed' model to an ecumenical movement in Scotland dominated numerically by Presbyterians, was that it did not simply replicate a more Episcopal/Catholic model of the retreat house, but was promoted as a dynamic vehicle for promoting missionary engagement with the world.⁴² For the SCM *alumni* who drove the ecumenical agenda in Scotland, it also offered the prospect of giving the 'SCM approach' to integrating faith and life a wider currency within the churches.

The SCEC's choice to head up the initiative was bold but predictable. Ian Fraser had been active in Scottish ecumenical networks throughout the 1940s and 1950s, working for SCM, attending SCEA conferences and chairing *Tell Scotland's* Commission on the role of *The Community* in mission.⁴³ At a time when many Scottish churches were doing well in terms of growth and attendance, his ministry in Rosyth had been distinctive as well as 'successful'. The combination of pastoral experience and ecumenical commitment with a notable intellectual and political edge was attractive to those who wished to see ecumenism in Scotland deliver on the promise of its social and political engagement.

⁴⁰ see Elizabeth Templeton's biography of Archie Craig, *God's February*, Templeton 1991

⁴¹ According to Fraser the idea for a House of the Churches was 'in the air' by the middle 1950s. Fraser 1969a, 171

⁴² The influence of the German reformed churches here, parallels the influence exercised by their *Kirchentag* celebrations, which were the direct inspiration for Scotland's 'Kirk Weeks' in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

⁴³ see Small 1964 for details of the *Tell Scotland* commissions in the late 1950s.

It is unlikely that Ian Fraser would have been lured to the post of Warden without the assurance of a vision for the new centre which went beyond that of a retreat house. Shortly after his appointment as Warden, he was sent with his wife Margaret to encounter some of the key sources of that vision when the Scottish Churches Ecumenical Committee paid for them to visit projects in other European countries. The trip – to centres in Germany, the Netherlands and France – was hugely influential in establishing the model for how Scottish Churches House would work during the following decade.

The trip's importance emerges not so much from the subsequent accounts of the House in print or through interview, but from analysis of the contemporary press cuttings, including a 1960 report by Ian Fraser. Much of Fraser's account re-surfaces in subsequent pieces in the Glasgow Herald and the Scotsman.

What these accounts and reports make clear is the importance of the model of the Evangelical Academy⁴⁴ for what was created at Dunblane. Fraser's 1960 article – significantly titled "*Dunblane Churches House is link in a new European movement*" traces their origins to the experience of those in concentration camps, where in the face of suffering, Christians discovered a new solidarity and acceptance of one another. Fraser describes the academies in Germany as

⁴⁴ "In Germany the word used was Evangelical Academy. The word academy is used in its original Greek sense, a place of conversation and common search for truth. The Evangelical Academy is a place of meeting for scientists, workmen, housewives, shop stewards and managers, doctors, nurses and administrators, farmers, farmhands, lawyers, artists and poets. They come together, Christians and non-Christians. They meet around themes which have not been chosen for them by an outside body, but have been singled out as significant by some of their own number. They come, not to be instructed, but to help one another think through questions of their vocation and relate them to the fundamental questions of life."

Undated press cutting (1960?) from around the launch of the house – "Dunblane Churches House is link in a new European movement" by Ian M. Fraser, SCH Archives/Early Vision/Press Cuttings.

In a 1996 article in *Christian Ethics Today* Franklin H. Littell notes that: "The patriarch of the movement called 'evangelical Academies' was Eberhard Müller, a former SCM activist and messenger between the 'intact church' of Württemberg and the Confessing Church. He started up in 1945 at Bad Boll, a quiet village in the hills east of Stuttgart. Boll was already famous as a Pietist community and as the center of the missionary and Christian social action work of Johann Christoph and Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt. Beginning with simple borrowed facilities, and helped initially by money raised by Reinhold Niebuhr and his circle in the United States, Eberhard Muller built in time one of the most important conference centers in Europe. Bad Boll also served as a model for other centers of lay education in Germany and also eventually on the larger map of world Christendom."

http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/007/Issue_007_August_1996.htm

playing a vital role in the post-war reconstruction of German society, describing how after 150 people attended the first one in September 1945:

..they came away convinced that the very nub of freedom lay in thoughtful, responsible consultation.

The growth of a responsible society in post-war Western Germany is inexplicable without the Academies which met this need. There are now 52 in all and over 100,000 people enter into consultation annually through them.⁴⁵

Fraser is delighted by the fact that the Director of the Dutch *Kerk-en-Wereld* [Church in World] centre had visited Iona before starting his centre, but his article is also clear that even with the example of Iona at home, Scotland must now look to the continent for a lead and learn from what had been achieved in these new centres. His observation offers an interesting marker for Scottish social theology at the end of the 1950s.

Among the most important contemporary accounts of Scottish church life in this period, are the two books published a decade apart by the Glasgow sociologist John Highet – *The Churches In Scotland Today* (1950) and *The Scottish Churches, A Review of Their State 400 Years After the Reformation*. (1960)⁴⁶ In 1950, estimating that 56% of the adult population are church members, Highet suggested that this figure means “the Churches may still be factors of some importance in the social and spiritual life of the nation and in the formation and expression of opinion”.⁴⁷ However, he also records the widespread concern among many churchmen in the years since the war about the “growing secularism of life in Scotland... the spiritual deadness of the country...the retreat from religion”.⁴⁸ Querying this concern about greater self-assertion by the ‘secularists’, Highet notes:

A general and frequently offered explanation is that more and more people are finding the Church to have failed in its wider witness to the faith it proclaims, or are regarding as

⁴⁵ undated press cutting (1960?) from around the launch of the house – “Dunblane Churches House is link in a new European movement” by Ian M. Fraser, SCH Archives/Early Vision/Press Cuttings.

⁴⁶ Highet 1950; Highet 1960; John Highet was one of the sociologists who took part in consultations at Scottish Churches House in the 1960s.

⁴⁷ Highet 1950, 2

⁴⁸ Higher 1950, 1

inadequate or even untenable its pronouncements on social and industrial matters and on the public questions of the day.⁴⁹

Where his 1950 book refers to the beginnings of new approaches to mission by D.P Thomson and Tom Allan, the 1960 volume contains an extended report and evaluation of what “may well be thought the outstanding feature of Scottish church life in the mid 20th century... evangelistic activities on a scale which in extent and variety must surely be unprecedented in the history of the Scottish Churches”⁵⁰. But despite reckoning the percentage of church members increased from 56% to 60% of the population⁵¹ (for adherents 66%) Highet is already, by 1958, detecting significant signs of drift in attendance, with 2/3 of Church of Scotland members not attending regularly. Setting aside sociological ‘objectivity’ he sniffs that: “It is a record that ill becomes a national church”.⁵²

Highet’s review was based on extensive survey work, analysis of official statistics and “discussions with 500 odd ministers” including D.P. Thomson and Tom Allan.⁵³ In an important passage he reflects on:

The concern aroused in the minds of many of the young men coming through the Divinity Colleges by the awareness of the gap between the Church and a disturbingly large section of the population and of its industrial workers in particular. ... the influence of the depression...Then came the war and in their experiences then many of these younger ministers found reinforcement for the growing conviction that some at least of the troubled, anxious minds that looked everywhere but to the Church for solace and guidance were its for the taking if orthodox ways could be supplemented by newer lines of approach. If the full story of recent evangelistic campaigns could be told, it would be in essence a story of the testing of hypotheses that arose out of developments and refinements of this conviction.⁵⁴

Highet’s conclusions in 1960 are that the impact of this unprecedented wave of evangelistic activity on church attendance for the whole of Scotland has been

⁴⁹ Highet 1950, 81 – A similar explanation features in the text of the Baillie Commission reports.

⁵⁰ Highet 1960, 70

⁵¹ equivalent to 2,100,000 Scots

⁵² Highet 1960, 63

⁵³ Highet 1960, 10

⁵⁴ Highet 1960, 74

“not very striking”,⁵⁵ although the possibility exists “that things would have been much worse without it”⁵⁶. His conclusion is sobering:

What our findings show clearest of all, however, is that if the Church is really to make inroads into ‘the lost provinces’ to borrow the title of the interim report of the *Tell Scotland* Commission in Evangelism, it must see the work of the past thirteen years or so, impressive though it has certainly been, as the merest beginning, the veriest rippling of the surface.⁵⁷

By 1960, despite huge efforts in evangelism and church extension, leading to very high levels of membership and of occasional participation, there was a sobering concern about how ‘church minded’⁵⁸ the Scottish people really were and whether Christian influence in society was fading. The decade of ecumenical negotiations in the 1950s had failed to unite the churches in a new polity, which would have offered the united witness to British society called for by the influential 1952 Willingen conference of the IMC, which had posited an integral connection between church unity and missionary effectiveness.

The work of the Baillie Commission had been acclaimed within and beyond Scotland and had provided a renewed programme for Church and Nation thinking in the subsequent decade. But how far had such commission/committee thinking permeated the wider church? Press reports dating from the launch of Scottish Churches’ House give strong indications that the leadership of SCEC and SCEA were concerned that nothing comparable to the Evangelical Academies had emerged within Scotland in the decade after the war. The existence, already by 1960 when Scottish Churches House was established, of a network of fifty such centres in Germany was repeatedly mentioned in Ian Fraser’s report and in the other main press articles in *The Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald*. Those who founded the new project at Dunblane, in looking to Germany for a model, were also hoping that SCH would

⁵⁵ Highet 1960, 104

⁵⁶ Highet 1960, 121

⁵⁷ Highet 1960, 121

⁵⁸ Highet 1950 1, he draws the phrase from a Reinhold Niebuhr interview with the *Glasgow Herald* in 1947, while he is visiting Warrack Lecturer

be the beginning of a similar, if more modest network throughout Scotland.⁵⁹ Their understanding was that within Germany, the academies had become a means of democratic renewal and social transformation through their highly effective model of engaging lay people, both Christian and non-Christian, from different classes and professions, in a process of dialogue and consultation about the future of their society. Their hope was that within Scotland, Scottish Churches House could have a similar influence and effect and that its ecumenical, as opposed to merely denominational identity could contribute materially to that end.⁶⁰

There was also a sense, despite the best efforts of those fighting to keep *Tell Scotland* together, that the two 'tendencies' within *Tell Scotland* would now have their own centres. The 'Billy Graham' tendency could look to the lay training centre at Crieff, with its emphasis on personal evangelism and church growth. The 'ecumenical' tendency now had Dunblane as a base from which to develop their response to the 1954 Evanston rallying cry that "the real battles of the faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices and farms, in political parties and government agencies, in countless homes, in the press, radio and television, in the relationships of nations".⁶¹

Church, World and 'Kirk-In-World' at Scottish Churches' House

Having traced the background to the establishment of Scottish Churches' House under Ian Fraser's wardenship, I now offer a brief description of the programme and work of the House from 1960-69, before moving to explore the theological accounts of world, church and church-world which underlay the work of the house and its first warden in these years.

The Programme of Scottish Churches' House 1960-1969

Scottish Churches' House was opened in 1960 as a project of the official Scottish ecumenical body the Scottish Churches Ecumenical Committee and its

⁵⁹ The Scottish churches of course lacked the financial resources of the German ones, where the 'church tax' collected by the state allowed such initiatives to be generously funded.

⁶⁰ From 1961 SCH was linked to the European Lay Institutes Network and it was accepted as a full member in 1964. Fraser 1969a 178

⁶¹ quoted in Fraser 1969a, 176

seven co-operating churches. From 1964, it became a project of the Scottish Churches Council, the successor to the SCEC, which also at this time incorporated the SCEA, *Tell Scotland* and Kirk Week.

At its launch the declared priorities of Scottish Churches' House were to be (i) Christian Devotion and the Practice of Prayer; (ii) The Ecumenical Project in Scotland and (iii) the Church in the World.⁶²

Ian Fraser's decision to accept the post as Warden of Scottish Churches House was based on his perception of it as offering a unique vehicle for interventions in the life of church and nation within Scotland:

It has always been important to provide both for existing denominational needs and related secular ones and for *the probing and venturing which the House was set up to undertake and which was intended to form a new element in the life of church and nation*.⁶³

That some of its most distinctive features have now become commonplace is a difference of historical perspective which needs to be noted if we are to appreciate how striking they were for contemporaries. It offered a chance to explore and develop theology without some of the attendant restrictions and isolations of the Scottish divinity faculty. An already well connected and well known figure in the Scottish ecumenical scene⁶⁴ and a prominent member of the Iona Community - Ian Fraser was also distinguished by a recent doctorate and a twelve year spell in parish ministry which had attracted national attention. There was therefore a more than geographical sense in which Dunblane, with its 'central' location at the 'heart' of Scotland marked out a theological location *between* the Scottish divinity faculties and a theological agenda which might move *beyond* what any those faculties were doing. This was reinforced by the *ecumenical* status of the house. The sometimes jaundiced ring of this term, half a century on, belies the motivational and inspirational force it had in 1950s

⁶² Craig op cit.

⁶³ Fraser 1969a 178, citing Review Memorandum from Dec 1961 – emphasis added

⁶⁴ Fraser was for example on the *Tell Scotland* executive in the 1950s and chaired one of their Commissions on Mission and Community.

Scotland for those who cared for such things. In 1960 therefore, despite the financial uncertainties attached to the venture, Ian Fraser had few doubts about its potential significance and he brought his formidable energies and capacity for work to bear on the task of realising that potential.

He was determined that the House should not simply replicate existing patterns of Christian meeting or thinking – his greatest fear was that it be seen simply as “a conference centre”. The problem with such a designation was twofold – firstly, he believed that conferences involved a passivity on the part of most of those attending. The prominence of the expert, academic or distinguished speaker meant that little or no opportunity was given to the gifts and skills of those attending. But Fraser was also concerned that the House itself should not be passive and that it should take on a dynamic initiating role in relation to theological engagement with strategic issues in church, nation and the wider world.

By his own account, Ian Fraser always had two questions ready when he identified or encountered a problem, theme or topic which might form the basis for a consultation: is anything needed in this field at all? does Scottish Churches' House have a role to play?⁶⁵ However, these ‘soundings’ taken by the Warden surely belie the objective tone given to them then and now. What is needed and what can be done will almost always depend on the perspectives brought to the question in hand. When we look at the decade as a whole, Ian Fraser seems to have been capable at looking at most areas of life in Scotland and seeing some need for a Scottish Churches' House consultation... Given that many of his potential clients in the early years had no idea what SCH could or could not offer, the ‘demand’ must have been to a considerable extent created by the vision and enthusiasm of the Warden.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Interview Two with Ian Fraser; pp202ff *Ecumenical Adventure*; Fraser 1969a 166

⁶⁶ In due course, the House also acquired a number of advisory groups in specific areas of expertise. Fraser 1969a 184

One notable aspect of the early vision which goes missing from the 2002 account is the presence in Archie Craig's 1959 draft of a *modus operandi* for the House of the phrase "mission among the intellectuals".⁶⁷ It is an important counterpoint to Fraser's concern with 'industry' and yet one which also had a significant left-wing pedigree. For obvious presentational reasons, it was not a phrase which could be used publicly by the house, but it demonstrates that the vision of those who set up Scottish Churches House and oversaw its programme was of a centre which was going to exercise *influence* within Scottish cultural life and aspects of the programming which emerged through the 1960s can be seen to reflect this highly specific and ambitious missiological aim.

Between 1960 and 1969, the House hosted three kinds of events – denominational events, where the House was booked by an individual denominational group who provided their own programme; ecumenical retreats and schools of prayer organised by the House; and ecumenical consultations organised by the House. Activities planned by the House made up around one third of the total activities.

From the outset it was determined that the main focus of the House's work would not be 'conferences' but *consultations*.⁶⁸ The choice of language was highly intentional and was attached to a methodology partly shaped by the physical constraints of the spaces at his disposal. Scottish Churches House could comfortably accommodate around 30 people for an overnight stay and Fraser was happy to rationalise this limitation as representing an effective maximum group size for enabling effective interpersonal exchange within gatherings which could usually only last for 24 or 48 hours.

⁶⁷ Craig op cit.; in *People Journeying* p185 this is quoted by Fraser as "with a particular concern for intellectuals". In a similar vein Fraser speaks of the importance of "Openness to atheists and agnostics and success in making it clear to them that they were wanted and welcome.... There is a company of exploration on the fringe of the church which could be very important for its future." *ibid.* 183

⁶⁸ Fraser 1969a *People Journeying* p166

The basic shape of a Dunblane style consultation was established very early in the life of the House.⁶⁹ On the basis of SCH archives, Ian Fraser's accounts in *People Journeying and Ecumenical Adventure*⁷⁰ and interviews with Ian Fraser, it is possible to identify five key stages in the consultation process:

1. *Programming*

The Policy and Programme committee was crucial to the achievements of Scottish Churches House in the 1960s. Initially chaired by Rev Dr Archie Craig (First General Secretary of the BCC, former Deputy Leader of the Iona Community, former chaplain and lecturer in theology at Glasgow University and Moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1962), it also included the towering ecumenical figure of Robert Mackie (past General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation). It is clear, however, that Ian Fraser's role as warden was crucial in the work of identifying key issues and concerns. Fraser was a skilled networker with a broad awareness of issues within contemporary Scottish society and culture. At a time when issues of rapid social change appeared to befuddle and threaten some church leaders, Fraser seemed to be energised by them. When he went to Scottish Churches' House in 1960 he was already caught up in a vigorous dialogue on many fronts about life in Scotland. The new appointment allowed him to make what was his passion into his daily work. He used his position to organise a decade of continuing conversations about life in Scotland. Based on the archival records, I estimate that between late 1960 when the house opened and 1969, when Ian and Margaret Fraser left for Geneva, there had been in 9 years somewhere in the region of at least 150 different substantive SCH initiated consultations at Dunblane on a wide range of social, political, economic, cultural, artistic, national and international and ecclesial questions. The arithmetic alone is staggering – showing an average of one consultation every three weeks for nine years. Here I list the main series of consultations

⁶⁹ On p201 of *Ecumenical Adventure*, Ian Fraser refers to a key decision taken by the Policy and Programme Committee in 1959 more than a year before the house was opened not to put on "programmed courses with an expert to act as leader". Fraser 2002, 201

⁷⁰ There is also a brief account by former deputy warden Gillian Carver included in *Ecumenical Adventure*

and the years in which they were held, as well as a number of single consultations.

Series Title	Consultation Themes	Years & Frequency	Total number of Consultations
Defence & Disarmament	Defence & Disarmament	1961, 1962,	2
Road Safety	Road Safety	1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966,	6
Examining The Faith	Worshipping Together; Baptism; Ministerial Order; Ministry of Whole Membership; Ordination of Women; Nottingham; Communion; Ordination; Church and its Mission; Proclaiming The Gospel; C of S and Cong Church Union; Charismatic Revival, Power Without Glory, Ordination of Women; The Shape of the Church; Holy Spirit and Gifts in Revival; Signs of the Spirit; WCC Ordination; Retreat Traditions	1961, 1962 (2), 1963 (2), 1964 (2), 1965, 1966 (2), 1967 (5), 1968 (2), 1969 (3),	20
Scotland	Scotland as Heritage; Scots Law; Education for Living; Arts in Scotland; Creativity & Communication; Cultural Effects of Economic Growth; Education; Nationhood and Sub-cultures; Art, Technology & Church; Power Structures & New Power	1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969 (2)	10
Sexual Attitudes		1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968	7
Tell Scotland Missioners Panel		1962 (3), 1963 (2) 1964,	6
Television	Creative Use (Pilkington Report); Bases of Discrimination - Programming and Viewing; Responsible Society (Uppsala);	1962, 1966, 1969,	3
Trade Unions	Common Market; Wages; Power & Responsibility	1962, 1964, 1965	3
Hymn Writing	Church Music Today	1962, 1963, 1964,	3
Apprentices	1966b with Public Schoolboys; 1966c with Public Schoolboys and Police Cadets;	1963, 1964 (2), 1965 (2), 1966(4), 1967, 1968, 1969 (2)	13

Social Workers		1963	1
International Relations	Steps Towards Peace, Scottish Seminar; World Poverty & British Responsibility; Causes of Conflict; Czechoslovakia; Polaris; European Co-Existence	1963, 1966 (2), 1967, 1968, 1969 (2),	7
Family Case Workers		1963	1
Mormonism		1963, 1964,	2
Arts	Autonomy & responsibility; Arts in Society;	1963 (2)	2
Training for The Ministry	recruitment, ordination, WCC consultation;	1963, 1964, 1965, 1966	4
Overseas Mission		1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968	6
Stewardship			1
Faith & Order	Pre-Meeting for Scottish Conference	1963	1
Social Services	Problem Families; Structure; Vol Sector (4)	1964, 1965 (2), 1966 (2), 1967 (2), 1968	8
Enterprise Youth		1964	1
Rural	Ministry, Issues; Rural Studies	1963, 1964, 1966	3
Sociology & Theology	Research, University Staff;	1963, 1964 (2), 1965, 1966	5
Housing	68 Glasgow's Housing Schemes; 'Voluntary Organisations; 69 Glasgow Schemes;	1964, 1967, 1968, 1969 (2)	5
Business Ethics		1964, 1968	2
Sharing The Gospel	Worship; Jesus is Lord; Prayer; Baptism; Diverse Gifts One Ministry; Communion; Son of Man; Humanity & Atonement;	1965 (2), 1966 (2), 1967 (2), 1968, 1969	8
Art, Drama, Theology Students	Authority	1966	1
Crime	Lawlessness in our Time; Roots of Lawlessness in Early Years;	1966, 1968	2
Media	Editors	1967	1
Theology & Science	Anthropology	1967	1
Teilhard de Chardin		1967, 1968	2
Nursing		1967, 1968 (2),	3

Churches Care of Pre-School Child		1967	1
Community Development	Kensington model; Detached Work;	1968, 1969	2
Religious Education	Church Membership; In Schools;	1968, 1969	2
Religious Drama		1968	1
Ecumenical Ethics	Authority & Protest	1969	1
Youth		1969 (2)	2
National Service?	New form of national service (Peace Corps)	1969	1
Easterhouse	Gang Violence	1969	1
Immigration		1969	1
TOTAL			152

2. *Pre-Consultation Preparation*

Once a topic or task had been identified for a consultation and a date set, there followed a process of preparation, largely undertaken and directed by the Warden. The Warden would identify key participants. Fraser's confidence and determination here was notable, writing in 2002, he describes the process like this:

In the building-up process and in the arrangement of the consultation itself the custom is to go bald-headed for the people who matter, however, distinguished or busy they might be. This has paid dividends all along the line.⁷¹

As well as being invited to attend, they would often be invited to submit papers or suggestions about the consultation subject. Through meetings and correspondence between the Warden and key participants, the subject would begin to "snowball" – gathering weight and momentum:

Near the time of the consultation, four or six weeks beforehand, the material which came in from all quarters would be set out and examined.... key points identified.... In nearly every case a working paper or outline was prepared, setting out the material so that community and difference of mind was shown and so that the questions and insights that came from different types of expertise bearing on the same subject were set before participants.⁷²

..by a process of meeting and correspondence, both ideas and people who have significant contributions to make are snowballed towards the time of consultation. Thus people become participant long before the event itself.⁷³

What this general account of the methodology and the more detailed reports of individual events (in *People Journeying*, *Ecumenical Adventure* and SCH Archives) also reveal is that for the bulk of the consultations, "the people who matter" were middle class professionals: civil servants, artists, media professionals, social care managers, industrial managers, academics, politicians and church leaders.

Only two continuing series of consultations, those with Apprentices and those with Trade Unionists can be considered to have approached a significant representation of working class participants.

Although the figure of the expert had been displaced from a lecturer role, the methodology still relied on the presence of experts, senior professionals and experienced practitioners. What Fraser was consciously doing was positioning SCH as a key hub within what could be called the Scottish "policy community". The "people who matter" mattered in the main because they were decision makers, opinion formers, researchers and communicators within Scottish civil society and civil service. The Programme

⁷¹ Fraser 2002, 203; 1969a 167 "As the reputation of the House for giving people the consideration due to their professionalism spread, there was a greater awareness and willingness to take part: but initially, one had to insist on and wait for some appropriate form of personal meeting with the strategically placed person, or work one's way through lower minions, determined to meet face to face the person who mattered most."

⁷² Fraser 2002, 202

⁷³ Fraser 1969a, *People Journeying* p167

Committee minutes for 1961 record the committee's firm belief that planned consultations relating to young people and sexuality "should be work undertaken with young people and not simply be about them".⁷⁴ However, looking back on the series of consultations on Sexual Attitudes and Habits held from 1961-1967⁷⁵ Ian Fraser later wrote that "We depended very much on the core of professional people since they represented fully professional opinion."⁷⁶ Clearly there was a tension here between the belief in participation and the need for "professional" expertise. Nor is it clear why 'young people' as a group should be singled out for this *proviso*. The culture of work 'about' still loomed large in most of the consultations, despite the awareness of the Warden and the Programme Committee that this was problematic.

That Scottish Churches House could lay claim to such a role⁷⁷ within Scottish social policy reflects two key features of Scotland in the 1960s. The first is the relatively high status still enjoyed by the churches, in particular the Church of Scotland within civil society, which earned them a hearing and gave weight to an institution acting in their joint name (ecumenism can also be presumed to have commanded a higher social status in this earlier and more novel phase of its history) which offered to broker consultations. The second is the relatively compact and cohesive nature of the 'policy community' and civil intelligentsia within Scottish society.⁷⁸ For a political and party political animal like Ian Fraser, the distance of the house from the Westminster Parliament could not help but be a source of frustration. But Scotland had its compensations in this respect which he was well aware of:

it was a grave disadvantage that in Scotland, one did not have on hand MPs who could be lobbied as was the case in the South of England....But there are great compensations. Scotland is a compassable country. One can be in touch with people who have important contributions in every area of the nation's life. One can develop an informal relationship with government departments to allow work of joint interest to proceed at an informal, yet mutually-committed level, which would have been quite impossible in England.⁷⁹

In his afterword to *Ecumenical Adventure*, Kevin Franz, then General Secretary of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) comments that "the life of the House as Ian charts it ...is in itself a social document, capturing the flavour and nature of the Scotland which it sought to serve."⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Fraser 1969a 186

⁷⁵ Edited reports from these were eventually published as *Sex as Gift* (SCM 1967)

⁷⁶ Fraser 2002, 120

⁷⁷ I am not suggesting it was the only place which fulfilled this role.

⁷⁸ On this see Lindsay Paterson *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland*, Ch 6 pp112ff. Paterson emphasises the need for the Scottish Office in the 1950s and 1960s to operate by "constructing consensus" and its strategy of sponsoring interest groups "so that it could readily find out what the range of opinion was" Paterson 1994, 112. The role of SCH as described here fits well with Paterson's picture of a pragmatic technocratic bureaucracy which constantly took soundings from 'civil society' groups.

⁷⁹ Fraser 2002, 203; Fraser 1969a 167

⁸⁰ Fraser 2002, 216; the reports of the consultations contain many verbatim quotes from participants which offer a resource to historians interested in the 'oral history' of the period.

3. *The Consultation*

We have already noted the way in which from the outset, Ian Fraser made a virtue (personal, face to face interaction) out of necessity (the limited accommodation at the House). The model of around 25-30 people meeting for 24-48 hours was established early and retained throughout the 1960s as it proved to be a highly workable format for the 'consultation' process. Fraser writes that "almost universally 25-30 was the maximum size for the interplay of thought and the building up of mind which was necessary".

The displacement of the expert figure lecturing up front (only on the rarest occasion would an individual speaker be allowed to address the consultation at length⁸¹) meant that the consultations needed to be chaired in ways which went beyond the honorific and introductory functions more commonly associated with chairing conferences. The task demanded something between the traditional Presbyterian task of 'moderating' debates and a more pastoral instinct for encouraging participation (what the 1990s called 'facilitating'). Ian Fraser reflects on this obviously crucial role at some length. He notes that "initial attempts at providing outside chairmanship had to be given up in favour of a different conception of the work"⁸². It was not enough for a chair to be a distinguished figure in the field in question – they had to be gifted and skilled in the "art and craft" of chairing and be able to deploy "an unusual blend of commitment and tentativeness".⁸³ It was also felt that given the thoroughness of the preparation for most consultations⁸⁴, to import a chairman who had not been party to this preparation or who was unaware of the potential connections between this consultation and another related consultation, was to lessen the overall effectiveness of the House's work. Fraser himself, therefore, (and later, on occasion, Gillian Carver the Assistant Warden) assumed this role for most consultations⁸⁵ and was clearly confident about his own abilities and performance in the role.

4. *Reporting*

Another aspect of the consultations which Fraser regarded as crucial was the task of reporting on them and disseminating those reports to participants:

The habit of reporting is a quite essential habit. It allows people to see how the whole consultation has developed, what growth of mind has taken place, what deep differences have to be reckoned with; and sketches outlines of further study and action which allow those who have participated to get moving so that change takes place in church and society.⁸⁶

He was committed, wherever possible, to "bring into the report not only the

⁸¹ Fraser 2002, 204; Fraser 1969a 168

⁸² Fraser 2002, 205; Fraser 1969a 168-9

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Fraser 2002, 204: "in nine cases out of ten people assembled not only having made some contribution to the preparation, but having been issued with a working paper in which the main ground to be covered was already pegged out by such contributions."

⁸⁵ Fraser 1969a, 169

⁸⁶ Fraser 1969a, *PJ* 170

ideas supplied by different people but to preserve something of the idiom and outlook of the person contributing”⁸⁷. He was also clear about what he hoped the consultations would achieve:

If members of consultations have been doing their work there should be as the result of their meeting some lines of further enquiry or study which have clarified themselves and certain forms of action which have commended themselves. If these are gripped and pinned down in the reporting, there is some hope that changes will take place in the climate of opinion and in actual practice. Without this, all that has happened has been a talking-shop.⁸⁸

He cautioned that in many cases Scottish Churches House neither could nor should try to direct the outcome of consultations:

Very often those who have taken part in consultations have channels themselves into which they can direct their fruits so that it is through already existing channels that further thinking is done and action undertaken.⁸⁹

However, in certain cases “since responsibilities show themselves which are not being dealt with, a group has to be set up” and at other times, effort and thought has to be expended outside the House to get some service established. Sometimes, the event of the conversation and the clarification which resulted, would be enough in itself.⁹⁰ A crucial concern would always be whether there was a need for a further consultation and while all Fraser’s accounts claim this question was always rigorously and conscientiously addressed, the large number of repeated and continuing consultations suggests that the experience of forming and bonding a group in a residential setting very often led to a desire to meet again.⁹¹ Such an outcome would have reinforced the group’s perception that it had done useful work and the self-understanding of SCH that it was playing a vital role.

In a typically blunt Fraser formulation, he wrote in 1969 that:

It has been very important that no official weight has been attached to any of the insights, conclusions, recommendations issuing from work in Dunblane. These have had to be of sufficient quality to commend themselves through their own merit or else they fall to the ground.⁹²

5. Dissemination

The question of dissemination of consultation reports was tackled cautiously from the beginning. What made at least some consultations possible was that they were held under something close to ‘Chatham House Rules’, so each consultation was allowed to decide for themselves whether some or

⁸⁷ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 169

⁸⁸ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 169

⁸⁹ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 170

⁹⁰ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 170

⁹¹ Fraser recognises this in his 1969 account. Fraser 1969a, 170

⁹² Fraser 1969a *PJ* 183

none of their work was publicised and disseminated.⁹³ e.g. the ‘television’ consultation was not publicised at all, while the ‘sex’ consultations were widely publicised and press released, leading eventually to a book published by SCM. Fraser, unlike many church leaders, was comfortable in working with the media and his enthusiasm about their role in disseminating information about the work of the House, meant that he was active in preparing press releases and working with broadcast media.

However, it is clear that the question of dissemination remained an area of frustration for Fraser and the Programme Committee. Fraser records that the January 1962 P&P meeting:

..mentioned a problem for which no solution was ever found. For wider distribution, reports of gatherings in Scottish Churches House would need to be written up differently and there was no time for this.⁹⁴

Were time to be found⁹⁵, while the reports are marked by the untidiness of consultations and their outcomes have mostly not been hammered into agreed final texts, their substance would be seen to amount to a kind of *summa* of Scottish social policy in the 1960s – a body of work on Scottish society, culture and politics probably unrivalled within Scottish civil society in that period and in the churches since then. To use the biblical metaphor approached by Fraser above, their main dissemination came from their being scattered like seed into Scottish society, as consultation participants returned into their own situations and contexts. The dissemination included the effects of the consultation *process* on *the people involved*. Some fell to the ground and was wasted, but some perhaps grew and bore fruit a hundredfold?

⁹³ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 183

⁹⁴ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 187

⁹⁵ The task is beyond the scope of this chapter.

The 'World' of 1960s Scotland

Having reviewed the programme and methodology of Scottish Churches' House in the 1960s, I now consider the theological account of 'the world' in which the House sought to be the Church.

The 1960s remains an iconic, unsettling and provocative decade in Scottish cultural history. Deplored and celebrated, loathed and valorised in almost equal proportions – a number of commentators and biographers have seen it as a kind of Rubicon for the theological method and approaches of the first ecumenical generation, including those of two of Ian Fraser's most prominent mentors. John Baillie of course died in 1960, but George Newlands suggests that:

The critical liberal theology of the Baillie inheritance tended to collapse in America with Vietnam, as the liberal theology appeared to some to have collapsed in 1914.⁹⁶

George MacLeod's biographer Ron Ferguson suggests that he was never comfortable with the cultural ferment of the 1960s.⁹⁷ David Edwards has spoken of the 1960s as a time when the "posh goodness" of a previous generation (he mentions Temple, Oldham, Eliot) struggled to accommodate itself to a more revolutionary age.⁹⁸

While Ian Fraser's work displays significant continuities with that of Baillie and MacLeod, temperamentally, socially and spiritually, he belonged to a different generation. His class background was different, with none of the 'clubbability' or ties to the establishment that characterised the Temple/Oldham/Baillie/MacLeod generation.

In Ian Fraser's work at Scottish Churches' House we find a bridge from the approach of the Baillie Commission and the early years of the Iona Community into the changed social and cultural mores of the 1960s. Here an approach to the world which was embraced at a more rarefied level by John Baillie is given a

⁹⁶ Newlands 2002, 110

⁹⁷ Ferguson 1990, 326

⁹⁸ Reeves ed. 1999, 180

distinctive incarnation in Christian practice. The 1949 SJT article makes it clear that Fraser had already embraced a new “politics of method” in theology, which centred on the need for the church to engage in an open and constructive dialogue and conversation with the world. This had clear affinities with John Baillie’s work in the Moot, but Fraser was anxious to pursue this dialogue within a more accessible social and ecclesial space.

His evolving commitment to this method can be seen as a factor in his early decision not to pursue a career within academic theology. After the 1949 article, the next developed reflections on his approach are found in *Bible, Congregation and Community*, in particular in a section entitled “The Life of the World”.⁹⁹ Here we find a confident theological reading of the world as the sphere of redemption:

The world is God’s by right. It cannot shake him off. No situation can empty itself of him now.... God is at the controls... There must be no clear frontiers of demarcation between the Church’s life and the world’s life, no grim iron curtain of faith. The man in Christ will not be concerned with distinguishing himself from the world, but only with making Christ known there.¹⁰⁰

His warnings here about a complacency which attends too much to the church’s own life should be seen in the context of rising levels of church membership in late 1950s Scotland. The perceived danger is of a ‘church with walls’ which fails to engage with the challenges of ‘industry’ and Fraser highlights the pioneering alternative of the Sheffield Industrial Mission. A relative confidence about the health of the church’s life is married with a strong defence of the achievements of the Welfare State and a robust commitment to participation in party politics:

The stability and virility of our own political life is firmly based on party politics... Why did the Suez incident catch Christians so much on the hop, so that, whether they supported or opposed the policy of the government, they seemed to have little effective voice except in the columns of newspapers? So few are found within the working of the

⁹⁹ Fraser 1959, pp51ff

¹⁰⁰ Fraser 1959, 53

party machines! So many stand outside *the main means of bringing effective influence to bear*.¹⁰¹

Here we have a vision of God's world as open to transformation and a belief that Christians should be in the forefront of social and political transformation. Christian responsibility is called to go "beyond neighbourly charity" and the larger compassion it aspires to "has to be given an institutional form if it is to reach out to every member of a community"¹⁰².

This, by itself, is a fairly conventional 'social gospel' approach, albeit it was exemplified in an unusually bold form given Fraser's combination of the roles of parish minister and Labour local councillor. What extends its significance for the scope and method of practical theology is Fraser's distinctive insistence that the world is worth *listening* to and must be listened to.¹⁰³ In practice this was to give a certain almost 'ethnographic' cast to his approach. It was linked in his understanding to 'the priesthood of all believers' and in its application of this doctrine to 'the world' it has some contemporary (1940s) parallels in the defence of democracy found in the work of A.D. Lindsay and John MacMurray, both scholars whose work Fraser was familiar with.¹⁰⁴ The kind of listening and dialogue which Fraser had become committed to, could not, he believed, be undertaken solely from within the academy.¹⁰⁵ In the Markinch years it meant listening on the shop-floor. In the Rosyth years it involved him in moving into 'public'/civic spaces such as the council chamber and Labour Party ward meeting, the Rosyth Institute (chosen for many church sponsored activities because it was a non-ecclesial space) and even the entrance to the public park, where he helped to organise Donald Soper style speakers' corners.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Fraser 1959, 63 emphasis added

¹⁰² Fraser 1959, 61

¹⁰³ In the Press Notes/Release issued by Fraser on the First Anniversary of the House's opening he writes: "the Church needs to take serious account of the world on which God's love is set, cultivate a listening ear, open itself to an understanding of the large issues of the day and learn to take decisions which enable its Lord to take firmer grip upon the world's whole life". Fraser 1969a *PJ* 177

¹⁰⁴ c.f. MacMurray 1941 and Lindsay 1934, Lindsay 1935

¹⁰⁵ That this does not imply a negative view of the academy can be seen in his own decision to study for a PhD and from the repeated invitations to academics in a variety of disciplines to participate in consultations at Scottish Churches House during the 1960s. He would also, of course, finally take up an academic appointment much later in life, when he left the WCC staff in Geneva to become Dean of Mission Studies at Selly Oak College in Birmingham.

¹⁰⁶ Ian Fraser Interview 1

With his move to become Warden of Scottish Churches House in 1960, Ian Fraser took the opportunity to refine and consolidate this approach over a decade of intense programming. Fraser's commitment to a *consultation* based methodology reflected his experience of SCM Study Groups in the 1930s and 1940s, both as a student and as a Travelling Secretary. It was also shaped by his experience of involvement in the Labour Party and his work with groups of Trade Unionists in the Markinch and Rosyth years.¹⁰⁷ Finally, it was confirmed by his visits to the continental lay academies, where a similar emphasis was already at work.¹⁰⁸ In terms of its 'pedagogy', aspects of his approach (e.g. in work with apprentices) invite comparisons with the later work of Paulo Freire, but less exotic comparisons from his own time can be found in the home grown examples of the Workers Educational Associations and those like A.D. Lindsay and R.H. Tawney who were charting radical alternatives and parallels to the perceived elitism of university based methods.

Ian Fraser's most developed contemporary theological reflections on the work of Scottish Churches House in the 1960s are found in a final appendix to *People Journeying* which contains "the substance of the Lovell Murray Memorial Lectures delivered in Toronto in April 1969".¹⁰⁹

In an opening section on "Concern For The World" Fraser responds to possible objections to the 'secular' concerns which have been at the heart of many of the consultations. He argues that what is at stake is "whether redemption is for creation"; "the scope of Jesus Christ's work and the dynamic character of change that he brings about in the created order" and "the nature of his Lordship". Taking up the terms of heated ecumenical debates from the decade, he argues that:

To say that the world sets the agenda for Christians is to accept its ambitions and pressures as defining the priorities for the Church. The world's claims and cries need to

¹⁰⁷ Interview Two Ian Fraser – from 1952 Fraser ran an Industrial Group within the congregation which at first imposed the condition on him that there should be "no bible" [no biblical input] in their meetings. This was later relaxed, although the members then disbanded the group for a time and then reconvened it again. It was an experience in which he by no means got his own way and now claims as an important learning period.

¹⁰⁸ An aside in *People Journeying* demonstrates how concrete this influence was when it says "Over the years, consultations have been mainly over one or two nights on average (as is the case on the Continent)." Fraser 1969a 182

¹⁰⁹ Fraser 1969a *PJ* piii

be sorted out: some will be immediately relevant to the gospel, some will be a diversion from it, some will have an appearance of relevance which cannot stand up to testing. It is quite a different thing to say that the world is the agenda. This points to the fact that God makes himself known and puts pressure on his church to respond by the way he handles events in the world.¹¹⁰

Turning to biblical theology he argues that creation shares with man “an out-of-jointedness” so that “it looks like an alien order”. Man’s destiny [sic] is bound up with the whole creation, God’s love is focused on ‘man’ “not as an alternative to but on behalf of everything else which exists”. Redemption begins a new humanity in Christ but also brings the hope [Romans 8] of creation being freed from its bondage to decay. He quotes from Calvin’s commentary on John 13:31 that the Cross is that in which “the whole world is renewed and everything restored to order” arguing that this renewal is of both processes and persons, both institutions and individuals. This means that those concerned with the Good News must be concerned about “the part played in a renewed creation by natural products and animals and structures of production and of society and means of producing change”.¹¹¹ For Fraser “the technical and the personal are intimately interrelated”. Technology and social structures impact on how people can and do live. What is needed is a new understanding of man’s call to “mastery” over the world, as a humble mastery under God which takes shape as a kind of “conversation” between man and the world, like the conversation between an artist’s subject, his materials and his own mind. Leonardo’s flying machine must respect “the terms the air imposes”. Fraser here articulates the sense of a ‘resistance’ within creation (it is set over against him) to man’s purposes, so that he has to learn to ‘partner’ it if he is to exercise his calling to true dominion.¹¹²

But intriguingly, he refuses to call this ‘Natural Theology’ – “There is no Natural Theology. There is theology and it includes nature”. We are not he argues conforming to the limits of some “inlaid pattern” but working towards God’s intention for creation. Theology in general – and the SCH consultations he

¹¹⁰ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 191

¹¹¹ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 192

¹¹² *ibid.*

suggests, exemplify this - exists to discern that intention in ever changing contexts.

Christian obedience in the world will require both prayer and political action. It will take seriously our own time and place, our own particular calling in history. It will also take seriously “the powers of this world” created by God and redeemed from estrangement by Jesus Christ. These powers, as Fraser expounds them include: technology, government, participation in government, the effects of automation, the demands of poorer nations, student protest, any kind of Establishment, manipulative features in education or training.

He argues forcefully, that truth about life can come from non-religious quarters: technology, management theory, the art and thinking of atheists and agnostics. God is not bound to the church. In a passage which echoes the closing argument of John Baillie’s 1938 Swanwick Address on the Church, Fraser argues that certain ministries “are not committed to the Church” and that “secular contributions” need to be respected and appreciated for what they are in themselves.

This rare glimpse of Fraser in an academic mode, also demonstrates his ability to engage the classical theological tradition by relating his account of ‘the world’ to “a difference of emphasis between the Greek Fathers and the Latin Fathers”, arguing that he is standing with the Greek Fathers and with Calvin (as opposed to the Latins and Luther!) in emphasising the new humanity in Christ and the promise of restoration for the whole creation. This stance leads him to press the need for the “continual renovation” of secular agencies and social structures.

If the Toronto lecture represents Fraser at a certain academic and geographical distance from Scotland, his other 1969 reflections in *Let’s Get Moving* show him in his most concrete and ‘indigenous’ mode of theology.

Here he is concerned with “the future of man’s life in Scotland”¹¹³ and here too, he takes the risk of reading social reality in Scotland in terms of God’s activity and initiative. Whether or not due to his appropriation of the inheritance of the

¹¹³ Fraser 1969b LGM 7

Greek Fathers and of Calvin, what is striking about Ian Fraser's account of 'the world' and 'Scotland as world' is how positive and optimistic it is, (from his work in the 1940s to his reflections in 2004). There are few traces of the more Augustinian sensibility which marks the work of John Baillie and the Baillie Commission in its time of crisis. Throughout his life and his writings, Fraser carries an extraordinary sense of the world as the sphere of redemption, the world as graced by incarnation and moving towards freedom. It is clear that in the latter part of the 1960s, he was influenced by the work of Teilhard de Chardin¹¹⁴, but this markedly positive account of the world predates this encounter and was more likely what drew him to de Chardin's work in the first place.

Here too, I believe, we have a clue as to how and why Fraser thrived in the 60s. To be 'Augustinian' in the 60s was for many within the church, an occasion for denouncing and deploring a perceived explosion of licence, irreverence, subversion and hedonism. Fraser's more 'Irenaeus' reading of the 60s combined with his robust socialism was able to celebrate it as a time of protean energy and revolutionary ferment. His theological and political allegiances converged too, in his sometimes romantic inclination to celebrate the goodness and decency of the working classes, over against a class-based tendency among some theologians and church-people to deplore the wickedness of the lower orders.

His 'Irenaeus' instincts seem also to have bolstered his life-long enthusiasm for the Labour Party. Politically, he was part of the generation who produced the 1945 Labour landslide and created the Welfare State.¹¹⁵ They knew radical social change was possible, because they had seen a National Health Service created, they had seen industry nationalised and they had seen a million Scots rehoused by the State in the 1940s and 1950s.

¹¹⁴ In the latter half of the 1960s, Scottish Churches' House ran a series of consultations based directly on Teilhard de Chardin's theology.

¹¹⁵ c.f Tom Devine's comment on Scotland's wartime government: "Johnston's administration was a powerful vindication that the state could be an effective instrument for improving the life of all its citizens. It raised expectations that the post-war world could bring better times and the misery of the 1930s could finally be consigned to history." Devine 2000, 554

Finally, he was also an Irenaean Scot, who read Calvin and Irenaeus through each other and had little appetite for the forms of cultural phariseism, puritanism or prudery which he felt had often been prominent within Scottish Presbyterianism. *Let's Get Moving* is frustrated with the churches because it is impatient, in a way analogous to MacDiarmid, for 'the new man in the new Scotland'. The results of this, as also in MacDiarmid, are extremely mixed – often inspirational, but regularly naïve and overly romantic and occasionally embarrassingly so. For example, Fraser hails the setting up of the Highlands and Islands Development Board as a deliberate act of imagination on a grand scale capable of healing the trauma of the memory of the Clearances in the psychology of the Northern Scot.¹¹⁶ Its creation was “a theological statement”, “an assertion of the dignity and worth of human beings.. a government promise of amendment of life and a plan for rescue”.¹¹⁷ (All of which hyperbole turns Willie Ross from a better than average Scottish Secretary into something like a Messianic figure!) The Industrial Training Act is similarly a theological statement in its mission to “rescue organised industry from a form of chaos and give a rational structure to training” (which sounds rather more like Genesis and *creatio ex nihilo* than the Industrial Training Act can bear).

Fraser is filled with a Wilsonesque faith in the white-heat of technology and indignant about “Muggeridge-wise” dismissals of it¹¹⁸ – so that the technological developments in the Inverness-Invergordon axis will bring dynamic social change and homeless families from Glasgow will be able to move to the jobs and new housing built for them there.

Culture too is widely celebrated – all of the arts extend human awareness, drama offers honest exploration, television brings global insights, the Beatles teach millions music as a discriminating language¹¹⁹. Visits to the De Marco

¹¹⁶ Fraser 1969a 39

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* 43

¹¹⁸ Fraser 1969b *LGM* 42

¹¹⁹ Fraser 1969b *LGM* 45

Gallery will offer an evangelistic alternative to the Billy Graham Crusade. The figure of the “Area Manager’ may offer the most effective model for the vexed question of how to exercise *episcopate* in a united church.

In the social sciences, there are promising signs of “a reintegration of Christian thinking around scientifically checked knowledge of human life and psychology”.¹²⁰ The Christian community is called “to move out .. into the life of Scotland using every scientific and cultural means to provide objective and sensitive appraisal of that life”.¹²¹

Summary

One puzzling feature of Fraser’s writing in this period, is that for all his radical politics, there is little angry denunciation of the sins of oppression and acquisition. He seems always to be more interested in affirming the value of workers than in criticising the behaviour of the bosses. At SCH, he seems to rather enjoy the patronage of the Countess of Mar and Kellie and the Earl of Wemyss, even in 2002 always using their full titles in references. Aside from criticism of Suez, there is hardly a hostile word directed against the social policies of the Conservative administrations of Eden and MacMillan. There is appreciation for the co-operation of St Andrews House in providing their “top civil servants” to take part in consultations, but less criticism than we might expect of the remoteness of government policymakers and bureaucrats from the severe poverty still existing in many sections of Scottish society.

There is also a sense in the reports of the consultations on Gangs in Easterhouse (with the constant references to the ‘risk’ the House took in bringing the boys there) and those on ‘problem families’, that there remains a huge gulf between the pretty, historic setting of Dunblane and the grimmer aspects of urban living. Fraser sometimes seems more comfortable, to use a 21st C anachronism, in the world of Gordon Brown’s “hard-working families”.

¹²⁰ Fraser 1969b, *LGM* 49-50

¹²¹ Fraser 1969b *LGM* 71

There is a sense of admiration for the skilled working-class man, the rough and ready apprentice, the thoughtful trade-unionist which seems to reflect a (1950s?) romanticism about the world of industry and the respectable labouring classes, but also a certain distance from the lived experience of Scotland's poorest urban communities.

Perhaps inevitably, the world of Scottish Churches' House and of Scottish ecumenism in this period was more often the world of the policy-maker, the social-worker, the artist, intellectual and the kirk elder, than it was the rawer world of those affected by their social power.

Perhaps, too, the world of 1960s Scotland into which Fraser directs so much love, energy, optimism and hope had many darker undercurrents which a more Augustinian reading would have wrestled with more directly. Fraser's world seems more the Irenaeus world of Neil Gunn than the Augustinian world of Alexander Trocchi – more Beatles than Rolling Stones – more de Chardin than Moltmann (or even perhaps Baillie).

As Fraser left for Geneva, Scotland's manufacturing base was beginning a final descent into decline. The post-war achievements of the welfare state were beginning to lose their shine and the heady confidence of the 1960s in social planning and the benefits of technology were being increasingly questioned. Far from 'the new man in the new Scotland', it was becoming a land of "no Gods and precious few heroes".¹²²

Scottish Churches' House and 'The Church' in Scotland

Set up and owned by 'the co-operating churches in Scotland' - the work of the House was mandated to proceed "in concert with the work of the SCEC" and when this gave way to the Scottish Churches Council in 1964, "to serve the Council quite specifically in its concerns".¹²³ The degree of independence and

¹²² The reference is to Hamish Henderson's folk song of that title, which was used by Christopher Harvie as a title for his social history of post-war Scotland. Harvie 1981

¹²³ Fraser 1969a, 178-9

initiative expressly allowed for in the beginning was however reaffirmed in 1964 as necessary “elbow room to experiment”.¹²⁴

In a manner worthy of George MacLeod and clearly indebted to him, Ian Fraser invested heavily in promoting the mythology of Dunblane as a Celtic holy site, symbolising the pre-Reformation unity of Christians in Scotland. Many of the early press releases and publicity documents feature his lengthy descriptions of the renovations of the House (by WCC workcamps and local craftsmen), weaving together the archaeological finds of Dunblane’s Catholic past with the architectural designs for its ecumenical future:

When the Chapel was dedicated it became a unique building in Britain – a building which, from the start, owed its being and use to eight co-operating denominations – a Chapel of unity by the will of the churches. The Chapel building dates back to the time of the undivided Church and is now at the service of the re-uniting Church.¹²⁵

Alongside this bid to associate Fraser’s Scottish Churches’ House with a Celtic mythology to match that of MacLeod’s Iona, a major programme track ran throughout the 1960s, of gatherings, ‘retreats’ and consultations which aimed at the renewal of the church’s life, the clarification of its order and the deepening of ecumenical relationships.

The House was formally opened in 1960 by no less than the World Council of Churches’ Central Committee, which broke off from its meeting in St Andrews to attend and inspect the work of its own ecumenical work-camp and conduct the formalities.¹²⁶ This high profile beginning was seen by the supporters of SCH as a confirmation of their hopes that the House might be a further ‘sign set up’ within the world church, which would come to occupy a distinctive and significant place within the geography of the global ecumenical movement.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Fraser 1969a 180

¹²⁶ The WCC meeting was brought to Scotland in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference and the 400th Anniversary Celebrations of the Reformation.

From the beginning SCH took seriously its role as an ecumenical ‘house of prayer’ with a Daily Office supplemented by annual Holy Week gatherings and regular observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It catered for many denominational gatherings every year, with a high demand for its facilities from the co-operating churches. It was also promoted by the Warden and the SCEC as a key venue for ecumenical meetings and encounters.

We have noted Archie Craig’s hopes in 1960 that despite the disappointment of the Bishop’s Report, the House could begin to build support within the churches for further ecumenical progress. Ian Fraser remained closely involved with the work of *Tell Scotland* and Kirk Week in the early 1960s until these initiatives were finally brought under the single roof of the Scottish Churches Council in 1964.

A series of twice yearly ecumenical consultations on church order ran throughout the 1960s under the banner of “Examining The Faith” – tackling in this order questions of: joint worship, baptism, ordination, the ministry of the whole membership, the ordination of women, evangelism, the Nottingham proposals for Church unity, ‘Mass, Eucharist & Communion’, Ordination (again), the Church and its Mission, the Gospel in our Time, the proposals for union between the Church of Scotland and the Congregational Church, the Charismatic Revival [sic], Ian Henderson’s anti-ecumenical *Power Without Glory*, the ordination of women (again), the shape of the Church, the Holy Spirit and Gifts in Revival, Signs of the Spirit today, the WCC document on Ordination.

Following concerns that the 1963 Montreal Faith and Order meeting had included virtually no lay people in its preparation or proceedings¹²⁷, a series of lay consultations were instituted under the heading “Sharing The Gospel”. These meetings held two or three times a year aimed to educate and empower lay people to take part in ecumenical debates and consultations about the order and mission of the Church, both in Scotland and globally. With a few

¹²⁷ Fraser 2002, 148

exceptions, they largely tracked the “Examining the Faith” themes in their choice of subjects. Reflecting on these initiatives in 1969, Ian Fraser suggested that:

one direct service SCH rendered the churches was this: it treated laymen as adults who were often treated in their own churches well below the level of their capacities and gave them enough encouragement and incentive to stay with these churches instead of breaking clean away.¹²⁸

Church-based gatherings on these staple, though also highly topical, themes alongwith retreats and denominational events far outnumbered the more controversial ‘secular’ consultations in the SCH programme.

While there was clearly by definition a great deal of diversity of perspective through these gatherings, Ian Fraser’s leadership and influence shaped the underlying currents in ecclesiology which flowed through the House’s own initiatives. Fraser’s ecclesiology in this period can be traced through four key texts: his 1959 SCM booklet *Bible, Congregation and Community* written for Kirk Week in that year; a 1961 SJT article on “The Apostle’s Doctrine and Fellowship”, his parting plea to the Scottish Churches set out in *Let’s Get Moving – A Plea for Church Revolution in Scotland* and the 1969 Lovell Murray Memorial Lectures delivered in Toronto and recorded (though scarcely ‘published’) in *People Journeying*.

Bible, Congregation and Community is a remarkable account of Fraser’s ministry in Rosyth and a seminal case-study of a progressive Church of Scotland congregation in the 1950s. Fraser’s ecclesiological reflections continue the ‘high’ ecclesiology of John Baillie and the Baillie Commission, asserting that:

The assembling of people in public worship and their issuing forth is held to be the most crucial action which takes place on earth. By it, the whole of life, the whole of creation is put in focus, given its true perspective. The world is gathered to God to be healed and blessed...In worship men are given new eyes with which to look out on the world and learn how to live a new common life in it.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Fraser 1969a 183

¹²⁹ Fraser 1959, 9

He is insistent about the necessity and place of the Church, which is brought into being by Christ, he its life and it his Body:

It is by means of the Church that the created order is to know him as Lord and be reconciled, in every part, to God the Father.

The Church's life in the world is characterized by the intimate relationship Christ extends to it... It is on this continuing relationship that the Church's good and the world's good utterly depends.¹³⁰

These two quotes capture a twofold emphasis which runs throughout the text – 'assembly' and 'issuing forth', 'the Church's good and the world's good' – the Evanston dictum is quoted: "Without the Gospel the world is without sense, but without the world the Gospel is without reality."¹³¹

On every page, Fraser insists on binding church and world together in his ecclesiology. "Congregational inertia is a blight" – to take seriously the priesthood of all believers calls for a new Reformation, in which lay people are given back their voices and ministries within the Body. Their worldly experiences and concerns are what must instruct the minister and inform the church's worship. But there must also be a movement from Church to world. The Church's walk through the world is "an Emmaus walk" – with the scriptures open and Christ at its side. In the church's hands is "the book which holds the secret of the world's life".¹³²

Fraser describes continuing and concerted efforts to increase congregational bible study and points to the Scriptures as the central place where Christ reveals himself to the Church: "In them alone does the Church discern its true face and know both what it looks like to God and what he hopes for from it".¹³³ Fraser makes clear his conviction that what Christ hopes for is that the equality of status among Christians will challenge the stratification of social status in the community; that the catholicity of the Church will challenge the huge inequality

¹³⁰ *ibid.* 10

¹³¹ *ibid.* 13

¹³² *ibid.* 17

¹³³ *ibid.*

between Western Christians and Asian Christians, that if severe economic recession were to return to Rosyth, the church would model economic brotherhood among its members.¹³⁴

Bible, Congregation and Community is a remarkable account of a local attempt to embody the theological vision of the Baillie Commission for the post-war Church of Scotland, but in its political radicalism and its practical commitment to the empowerment of lay people it goes some way beyond that vision. The irony at its heart is the extent to which this dramatic agenda for congregational empowerment appears so dependent on the charismatic energies of one congregational leader and his willingness to challenge the conventions of ministerial roles and prerogatives. The book displays the ‘radical orthodoxy’ of Fraser’s own vision, the ‘dynamic simplicity of that ecumenical consensus about the revealed nature of the gospel and the missionary nature of the Church’.¹³⁵ It offers an inclusive vision of Christian practice which defies evangelical, ecumenical and liberal labels. A measure of its boldness is the extent to which its description of congregational life in the 1950s still offers a radical contrast to the practice of many Church of Scotland congregations today.

Ian Fraser’s next published writing on ecclesiology sees him returning to the genre of the scholarly article and entering the troubled waters of ecumenical debate about church order in the wake of the Bishop’s Report. His 1961 SJT Article on “The Apostle’s Doctrine and Fellowship” is written from his new location at Scottish Churches’ House, occupying a responsible and symbolic position at the heart of Scottish ecumenical co-operation. Recognising the necessary but limited role of top-level inter-church conversations and agreed statements, it echoes the emphases of Lund and New Delhi for ecumenism to be made a living reality in local situations.

¹³⁴ *ibid.* 46

¹³⁵ The terms are David Edwards, from the quote mentioned previously.

Here Fraser argues that Christ's ministry is pre-eminent and the call to church membership is a call to participation in that ministry. After and out of the ministry of the whole Church comes the calling and ministry of the ordained. The apostolic succession is given to the church as a whole and not separately to the ordained. The apostolic character of the ordained ministry is found in its missionary character and its calling to strengthen the Church in its mission, not in any institutional lineage.

The break of the Reformation enabled a true apostolic ministry to be re-established and reinvigorated within the Church.

Having established his impeccable Reformed and Protestant credentials on the matter, Fraser finally turns to the question of episcopacy. Episcopacy, he asserts, *is* manifestly agreeable to the Word of God. The Church of Scotland needs to abandon its prejudices and open its mind to the new forms of episcopacy emerging in the world Church, in India, for example. The Church of the future *may* well have an episcopal structure – this may be where God is leading. But, Fraser argues, that is very different from saying that it *must*. The resistance among Episcopal Churches to ecumenical unions, *even where episcopacy has been accepted in their united life* is a cause for concern. It seems also that the richness of the gift of episcopacy has to be lived with to be appreciated. The closing proposal, spelt out in rather vague and elusive terms, is for union to proceed but the two churches to stay exactly as they are and learn from their life together.

The article is therefore ultimately disappointing. It places Fraser firmly alongside the well rehearsed 1957 position of those like Baillie, Craig, Manson and Torrance who believe episcopacy is not theologically necessary but is theologically acceptable for the sake of Christian unity. For all its well executed theological moves, they are hardly in any sense original and the weakness of its orientation towards action or practice, its failure to present any practical account of how such a union might be possible leaves it in the place of 'academic' irrelevance Fraser characteristically deplores. Certainly the issues were

intractable, but in this case the normally bold Warden of Scottish Churches' House appeared to have let discretion overcome valour.

While Ian Fraser was active in the Nottingham BCC process and implicated directly in its famous call for unity by 1984.¹³⁶ We have nothing more published on ecclesiology of any substance until the two pieces from 1969.

Let's Get Moving was published as Fraser prepared to leave Scotland for a WCC post in Geneva. It has the character of 'a parting shot' - an 'explosion' he hopes may help to clear the log-jam in inter-church relationships in Scotland.¹³⁷ It is a significant text because for all of its brevity, it is one of those rare creatures - an ecumenical missiology of Scotland - which stands alongside (and in the tradition of) George MacLeod's *We Shall Rebuild* (1945), Ralph Morton's 1951 *The Household of Faith* and Tom Allan's *The Face of My Parish* (1954).¹³⁸ In this work we find Ian Fraser's most developed reflections on how 'church' is to be related to Scotland. I will return to that relationship in the next section, but here I want to consider the ecclesiology of *Let's Get Moving*.

In line with the argument of his 1961 article, Fraser roots the church in a 'functional' and missiological understanding of apostolicity. Church order in Scotland must serve the church's mission to Scotland and the churches as they stand are "not fitted to do the work" they are called to. The churches stand in urgent need of renewal and reform. They have the resources to meet the needs of their time, but are not using them. That they have them is why we can claim that "the ecumenical movement is the hope of Scotland".¹³⁹ Having made this bold assertion, Fraser moves in successive chapters to demolish the claims of Scottish Episcopacy and Scottish Presbyterianism to provide that hope apart from ecumenism. He seeks to criticise equally the theological presumption of Episcopalians about "the three-fold office" ("historically it has never worked")!¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Interview One with Ian Fraser

¹³⁷ Fraser 1969b *LGM* 3

¹³⁸ Morton 1951

¹³⁹ Fraser 1969b *LGM* 8

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.* 9

and the political presumption of Presbyterians (“the right to be a national church is one which has to be re-earned in every generation”)¹⁴¹

He is highly critical of the Church of Scotland over the lack of lay participation at General Assembly and the restrictiveness of its committee cycles: a lack of time for proper consideration of issues hampers committees like Church and Nation, so that:

It must be radically questioned whether many aspects of life in Scotland, at present covered by committees and commented on by them, are advantaged by having Church pronouncements on them at all.¹⁴²

Fraser also criticises that church’s “pre-occupation with blanket territorial coverage” as a sign of its failure to understand how the role of a national church has changed.¹⁴³ He argues for a major redeployment of up to 500 men [sic] away from parishes into new sectoral ministries e.g. to industry and to the universities. Of particular interest to this thesis is his continuing appeal, some 25 years on, to the work of the Baillie Commission and its proposals for re-organising the work of ministry:

If serious attention had been paid to a wartime report of the Church of Scotland, a good deal of change might already have taken place in its life. But we have the habit of receiving reports, applauding the authors – and leaving it at that.¹⁴⁴

What is intriguing about Fraser’s approach however, is that while he critiques the territorial fixities of the parish system, his own approach is also characterised by a strong sense of territory and of the changing social geography of Scotland.¹⁴⁵ Remarkably, Fraser attempts to sketch a blueprint for a thorough-going missiological re-design of the Church in Scotland:

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* 17

¹⁴² *ibid.* 19

¹⁴³ *ibid.* 18

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.* Fraser offers a lengthy quote here from *God’s Will for Church and Nation* SCM 1945, p172 on the relation between “the present ineffectiveness of the Church’s witness” and “mechanical defects in the organisation of its ministry”.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.* 39

My plea is simply this. The whole of Scotland should be surveyed afresh.¹⁴⁶

His wide-ranging arguments *Towards a Church Strategy for Scotland* display the strengths and weaknesses of a visionary mind, willing and able to think on a grand scale.¹⁴⁷ In the previous chapter I aligned the theological work of the Baillie Commission with Christopher Harvie's concept of a wartime 'political renaissance' – but Baillie does not quite fit the role of an ecclesial Tom Johnston. On the evidence of *Let's Get Moving* that role, with its combination of strategic vision and concrete detail belongs to Ian Fraser, with the crucial difference that in 1969 he has no powers to instigate change save the powers of persuasion. At the end of a decade of work in Scottish Churches' House, we find something of the original vision for a network of 'ecumenical academies' resurfacing, with the suggestion that in view of the plans for social and economic renewal in the Highlands and Islands "what is needed here is probably a Highland House, a brother for Scottish Churches House".¹⁴⁸

Interviewed in 2004, Fraser did not accept my suggestion that it was an 'angry' book, but it is hard for readers today not to be struck by the acute sense of frustration which runs through it. There is some sense here that the ecumenical disappointment which overtook the Craig-Baillie generation by 1959, had a decade later begun to weigh on even their most optimistic students and successors.

'The Ecumenical movement is the hope of Scotland' but Fraser sees the churches whose action could release that hope as stuck in a morass and hopelessly logjammed. The only way forward is to recover the church's missionary responsibility for contemporary Scotland.¹⁴⁹ Scotland may or may not be a Christian country but "it is" Fraser insists "a country of Christians".¹⁵⁰ In this

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* 25

¹⁴⁷ The ecumenical experiment at Livingston, for example, was to be "not simply a beacon, but a torch thrust into ready undergrowth to start a forest fire." (!) Fraser 1969b 34

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* 40

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* 39

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.* 55

country, “the Church is still trusted” and because of this can play a key role in debates about Scotland’s future.¹⁵¹

In a moving passage, which has interesting parallels with Hauerwas’ approach, Fraser rejects calls to abandon the church as institution and affirms his belief in the centrality of the church in God’s purposes for the renewal of Scottish life:

I believe in the Church. Not the Church of cloud cuckoo-land, the Church-as-never-was: but the spotted and wrinkled Church of day-to-day experience. No other body in the world has what it takes to deal with our contemporary situation....
...As far as I can see this inadequate Church is the Church that Christ still accepts, in which he continues to dwell, which he still intends to make a sign or first fruits of a restored humanity and a rehabilitated creation. .. The actual Church can be the main sign of God’s presence in our time.¹⁵²

Questions of the merger of the Episcopal Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland are important, but they are secondary to the essential task of reforming the life of the churches for the task of mission to Scotland.¹⁵³

Our final insight into Ian Fraser’s ecclesiology comes from the 1969 Lovell Murray Memorial Lectures delivered in Toronto. Here he argues that ecumenism has made for a more colourful, varied and flexible church and even in the past decade has enabled the emergence of new and significant forms of worship and Christian presence in the world.¹⁵⁴ Scottish Churches’ House is evidence of this. The vital mission of Christian lay people is hindered by their being united in faith on the factory floor, but deprived of “common nourishment at one Table” in the churches.¹⁵⁵ Some of the necessary rethinking of ministry and mission has been undertaken by groups at Scottish Churches’ House (Examining the Faith; Sharing The Gospel). Sounding the Willingen (IMC) note he argues that ecumenical unity is missiologically vital. The unreconciled Church cannot bear effective witness to the ministry of reconciliation in the world. Scottish Churches’

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* 53

¹⁵² *ibid.* 62, 63

¹⁵³ *ibid.* 65

¹⁵⁴ Fraser 1969a 196

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

House has provided “some sign that there is one Church, that it exists for one world and that there is one Lord of Church and world.”¹⁵⁶

He views the work of the House as more evangelistic than a Billy Graham crusade. It is grounded in the *missio dei* – in a journey towards God with others, both professing Christians and agnostics and atheists.¹⁵⁷ Mission describes a challenging encounter with those who are ‘alien’ to us and a realisation that God is at work in ways of his own choosing in every culture.¹⁵⁸ This journey involves risk and openness to what is alien, so that the church “must have the small worlds in which it indigenises God continually shattered”.¹⁵⁹ But it need not result in a loose and indeterminate conception of dialogue – evangelism, Fraser argues, involves us being open to God in our openness to others, so that both believer and unbeliever may go on being “converted”.¹⁶⁰

Summary

Fraser’s ecclesiology by the end of the 1960s is still marked by the strong confessional claims evident in *Bible, Congregation and Community*, but there are also signs that it appears to be becoming more ambivalent. The tide has begun to go out on the social and cultural position of the Scottish churches and there is little sign of the will to ‘get moving’ with the necessary ecumenical missionary mobilisation he envisages. There has been no progress in creating a network of ‘ecumenical academies’, not even the two additional Highland and Southern centres he had once thought possible.

Protestant ecumenism in Scotland has stalled in the cultural and theological fixity of the two main British ecclesial traditions. The seismic shifts of Vatican II have not yet been fully felt by Catholics or understood by Protestants within Scotland. The Church of Scotland has moved painfully slowly towards the ordination of women and even more slowly towards making a reality of lay ministry within

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* 198

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* 201-3

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* 204

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.* 205

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* 208

congregations. It has also begun to haemorrhage members with the working classes and intellectuals leaving fastest. The Iona Community had struggled free from the grip of George MacLeod and into a perplexing decade of debates about 'secular' Christianity.

To understand the significance of what went on at Dunblane, it may help to set it within a broader narrative of ecclesiology in the 1960s. Here is Lesslie Newbigin's parallel reflection to the one quoted earlier from David Edwards on the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s. Speaking of the 1960 World Student Christian Federation Strasbourg conference on 'The Life and Mission of the Church', Newbigin writes:

It was the brainchild of D T Niles and Philippe Maury who believed, as I did, that there was an emerging theological consensus about the missionary nature of the Church and that the coming generation of student leaders could be captured and fired by the vision so that a new generation of ecumenical leaders could be prepared to take the place of those who were growing old.... To quote the report in the WSCF's journal: 'It must have been striking to everyone how much indifference there was to the theological issues and ecumenical achievements of an earlier generation.' The convictions to which I and those of my generation – DT Niles, Visser 't Hooft and Philippe Maury – had come with much wrestling were dismissed, to quote the same report as 'pious talk and Geneva ideology'. The new vision was of the world, not the Church as the place where God is to be found.

.... The most articulate exponent of the dominant mood was Hans Hoekendijk whose address called us 'to begin radically to desacralize the Church' and to recognize that 'Christianity is a secular movement – this is basic for an understanding of it'.

On a personal level I found the event very painful. It was painful to experience the contempt in which missions were held... I had been pleading for a 'churchly' unity... I was soon to learn that 'churchly' was an adjective of abuse and that the only way to be really part of God's work as understood in the 1960s was to leave the Church behind. The 'secular decade' had arrived. The SCM would not again in my lifetime be, as it had been, the most powerful source of new life for the ecumenical movement.¹⁶¹

Fraser's ambivalence lies in his attempt to negotiate both visions – to hold together the 'theologically obvious' centre of his 1950s missional ecclesiology with his openness to and sympathy for the radical questioning of the new ecumenical generation. His willingness to try and his impressive sustained

¹⁶¹ Newbigin 1993, 164-5

experiment at Dunblane made him a crucial resource for the WCC staff who half press-ganged, half pleaded with him to come to Geneva.¹⁶²

Like Newbigin, Fraser would return decades later to a new role in a changed Britain¹⁶³, where his theological voice could again be heard more clearly. But in the years of church decline and ecumenical stasis of the 1970s following his move to Geneva, it would be a brave man or woman who continued to echo his 1969 claim that the ecumenical movement was ‘the hope of Scotland’.

Church and World – A New Conversation

Having explored the accounts of world and church which informed Ian Fraser’s work at Scottish Churches House, I want to consider the construals of the church-world relation which emerge from this second case-study of Scottish practical theology.

The reports John Baillie signed off in 1945 at the age of 59, offered a substantial agenda for the life and ministry of 28 year old Ian Fraser and there is real continuity between the work of teacher and student – powerfully symbolised by Baillie’s giving the charge at Fraser’s induction to Rosyth. The Ian Fraser of 1949 endorses the Oldham-Baillie conceptual framework of ‘middle axioms’ in setting out his account of “Theology and Action” but this is the last explicit mention of this more formal methodology.

For most generational transitions, the goals of the new generation are rarely identical with those of the old and Fraser developed the Baillie legacy in distinctive ways. Ian Fraser was more impatient (and perhaps less confident?) in his relationship to the academy than John Baillie had been. His critique of liberal society was also different. Having been in France during two world wars and seen the rise of fascism in his own lifetime, Baillie’s approach reflected a greater attentiveness to Barth and this gave a more Augustinian cast to his reading of a

¹⁶² Interview One with Ian Fraser

¹⁶³ Fraser returned in 19?? to be Dean of Mission at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham

world in the crisis of war. By contrast, Ian Fraser's work in the post-war era, moves away from an Augustinian theology of crisis to an 'Irenaean' theology of reconstruction. He has never been a pacifist and the sense of a providential victory for the Allies over fascism may have strengthened his conviction that God was at work in history to renew the world in Christ.

Fraser's particular importance for tracing a Scottish tradition of practical theological reflection on church and society comes through the worked examples, the 'signs set up' in his ministry at Rosyth and his work at Scottish Churches' House. Here we find Ian Fraser practising and demonstrating something of the 'open Christian civilisation' which John Baillie had advocated.

On the one hand, Fraser maintains a firm commitment to the centrality of the Christian Church in God's purposes for the world. He takes on the ecumenical vision of the church's calling to be a sign of God's coming kingdom. He places a high value on the biblical witness and pioneers creative approaches to what might today be called 'contextual bible study'.

On the other hand, Fraser's version of civic Calvinism displays little of the sharp critique of secularism and of the Enlightenment which characterised Baillie's account of 'the world' of the mid twentieth century. It warms instead to some key John Baillie emphases on the God-given autonomy of cultural spheres in the life of the world and insists on respecting the graced and redeemed character of the life of creation beyond the church as a sphere in which God is active. In the 1960s, Fraser therefore brings to the work at Scottish Churches' House an ability to *celebrate* the world and a commitment to *listen* to the world. These theological convictions and instincts are incarnated and demonstrated in the practices of the House.

It is possible to identify three distinct models of the church-world relation in the different types of consultation the House organised.

- i. Consultations organised *by* the church *for* the world
- ii. Consultations organised *by* the church *with* the world
- iii. Consultations organised *by* the church *about* the world

In the first type of consultation, exemplified by the consultations on the re-organisation of Social Services in Scotland, the House hosted and resourced consultations which engaged aspects of Scottish social, political and cultural life on the basis of secular professional, expert and technical models, with no explicit theological input or critique. In these circumstances, the House, representing the Churches, simply functioned as a trusted dialogical space, held open for action which it was hoped would work towards the renewal of 'man's life in Scotland' and thus serve the purposes of God in the world.

Alongside these 'secular' dialogues, the House continued to organise consultations, such as those on the Arts, which were conceived as conversations between the Christian tradition/theology/the church *and* an aspect of life in Scotland. In these cases, there was a more intentionally configured dialogue between those wishing to explain and refine Christian understanding of a subject and those outwith the Christian tradition willing to encounter, engage and challenge Christian perspectives.

The third type of consultation acted as a form of theological education, in which church people, predominantly lay people, were brought together to reflect on aspects of Christian discipleship in the world. In these examples, the aim was to support an internal dialogue within the church and to help those already within the Christian community to access biblical and theological resources and gain confidence in their own ability and calling to undertake theological reflection.

Summary

The relationship between church and world was a primary concern, perhaps the primary concern of Ian Fraser and those he worked with in planning the programme at Scottish Churches House.

At times the language used to describe this relationship pulls in different directions. On the one hand, those leading the work of SCH are conscious of a “gap” between the church and the world, which they want to bridge. They take up the language of spatial separation to draw attention to groups within Scottish society who are often alienated from the church – the poor, industrial workers, artists, intellectuals, young people on schemes.

Over against this image of separation, however, it is clear that a key affirmation which Ian Fraser and the Programme Committee wished to make was that the laity *were* the church in the world. They were the church sent out daily in mission, dispersed throughout society and fully integrated into the world.

The aspect of the church-world relationship which Ian Fraser seems to become more wary of through the 1960s is what we might call a *kerygmatic* understanding – one which prioritises the church’s proclamation of the gospel in and to the world. By the time of his 1969 Toronto lecture, he is arguing that within a holistic understanding of *missio dei*, the practice of the House is a better example of evangelism than a Billy Graham crusade.¹⁶⁴ He wants mission and evangelism within mission to be understood wholly in terms of exploration and journeying alongside others - “We must never be too confident about our presentation of the gospel” and “one can never categorise people into those who have arrived and those who have to struggle towards a light”.¹⁶⁵ The language of revelation has mutated into a more diffuse conception of “openness to God” and the apostolic role of the church is heavily qualified in terms of the believer’s own need to go on being converted alongwith the unbeliever and to be evangelised by God through those outside the church.¹⁶⁶ The church is still in D.T. Niles’ imagery, the beggar who knows where there is food to be found, but

¹⁶⁴ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 201

¹⁶⁵ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 202,203

¹⁶⁶ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 206

like Peter it may not understand which foods are 'clean' and may need to be evangelised by the heathen enquirer Cornelius.¹⁶⁷

A 'Consultation' With Hauerwas

Comparing the perspectives of Ian Fraser in the 1960s and those of Stanley Hauerwas it is hard not to feel that despite the great range of issues around which there ought to be deep mutual appreciation, there would also be a fair amount of suspicion and exasperation in the conversation we might imagine between them.

In this mythical, staged consultation¹⁶⁸, the key site at which we might expect theological communication to break down, would be the question of how we give a theological and biblical account of 'the world'. Hauerwas' insistence that the world needs the church to tell it that it is the world would seem bound to provoke the immediate rejoinder from Fraser that the church needs the world to tell it that it is the church. Which is to say that each of their perspectives is characterised by a heightened awareness of the dangers represented by the characteristic emphasis of the other.

Hauerwas, I believe, would be highly suspicious of the way Baillie's (Augustinian) reading of the world as crisis and his critique of the humanism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment seemed to have been quietly dropped by Fraser in favour of a suspiciously Hegelian/de Chardinian rehabilitation of history as progress. This would prompt him to a provocative interrogation of Fraser's socialism, which queried the extent to which its basic conceptual assumptions had ever been truly brought into a theological dialogue with the Christian story. In particular, I can imagine Hauerwas objecting that Fraser's eschatology is overly realised and as ever, his willingness to justify violence and coercion would be a key test of this.

¹⁶⁷ Fraser 1969a *PJ* 204

¹⁶⁸ These are of course two constructed characters – only one of which has been allowed to evolve past 1969.

Fraser's counter-suspensions would focus on the absence in Hauerwas of a theological account of justice and a concrete political programme to secure it. He would be wary of Hauerwas' overly futurist eschatology and argue that he has failed to offer an adequate account of how Christ brings 'substantive' deliverance and redemption to creation.¹⁶⁹ He would be unhappy at Hauerwas' willingness to polarise church and world and might suggest the whole thing smacks of Manichaeism. The theological ironies might start to become heavy when Fraser offered an Irenaean justification of force in opposition to Hauerwas's Augustinian pacifism!

In a more positive vein, Hauerwas would appreciate Fraser's strong affirmations about ecclesiology. He would affirm his commitment to the disciplines of worship, retreat and spiritual formation and appreciate the richness of his emphasis upon the scriptures. Fraser in turn would appreciate Hauerwas' attempt to display the richness of the church as politics and his emphasis on the church as social ethic.

Ultimately, however, it is not a meeting I am completely hopeful about. To leave the stage management to one side, my concern is with tracing a developing tradition of practical theology in Scotland and Fraser's place in it.

In the transition from Baillie to Fraser, what has remained constant is the willingness to affirm the centrality of the church in God's redemptive purposes and the potential for its order to be a sign of what God in Christ intends for all creation. What has changed is the theological reading of the world. Fraser shares with Baillie a type of Reformed conception of the creation as a sphere where God is at providentially at work in the orders and powers of human existence, so that these may have a proper autonomy under God from the church's calling and sphere of ministry. The principal problem with Fraser's account of the world, which seems to be related to his strongly (though not wholly) realised eschatology, is that (unlike Baillie) it over identifies the life of the

¹⁶⁹ c.f Fraser 1969a *PJ* 207

world and the life of the kingdom and produces an over optimistic reading of history which leans towards romanticism and risks becoming ‘Pelagian’ – failing to reckon with the need for the knowledge which is human self-assertion to be confronted with the knowledge which comes from faith.

Here we can recall a point made in an earlier chapter, where it was noted how in *With The Grain* Hauerwas takes issue with Barth’s hostility to the idea of seeking specifically ‘Christian’ knowledges in history, science, morality or art, arguing that the church does have a stake in challenging false notions of these on theological grounds and “in producing knowledge that is congruent with the knowledge that is faith”.¹⁷⁰

Given Hauerwas’ desire that the church should produce Christians capable of sustaining an argument with the world, it might seem markedly unfair to a decade of debate, consultation and argument at Scottish Churches’ House to accuse Fraser of being at fault here. However, in the end, what a ‘consultation’ with Hauerwas suggests to us is that in key respects, Fraser’s account of the world and therefore of the church-world relationship is too accommodating to a secular vision of epistemology and ethics. The choice he set up between Greek and Latin fathers seemed at crucial moments to be more a choice for de Chardin than for Calvin.

That said, Fraser’s achievement was remarkable and Scottish Churches’ House was indeed a sign set up for Scotland and its churches. Its work deserves to be remembered, valued and learned from. For the Reformed tradition in Scotland, so often accused of a pathological obsession with the world’s depravity, a churchly theologian who faced the 60s with confidence and optimism, rather than ‘fear and loathing’ remains a key prophetic witness to the incarnation and a salient part of the story of how we are to be the Church in the world which is Scotland.

¹⁷⁰ WGU Hauerwas 2001, 203

Chapter Four
Duncan Forrester and
The Centre for Theology and Public Issues
1978-2000

Introduction

With this third combination of theologian and institution, we come to the threshold of the twenty-first century and in the work of Duncan Forrester we find a theologian who has carried on a real, rather than a merely staged or imagined dialogue with the work of Stanley Hauerwas. Our focus on the Centre for Theology and Public Issues (CTPI) also introduces a new consideration – while the Baillie Commission was a single denomination initiative and Scottish Churches House an ecumenical initiative, CTPI is located within the modern Scottish academy, as part of the University of Edinburgh. This third location for practical theology poses the question of the relationship between theology, church and Scotland in a distinctive way.

In this chapter, I begin with a biographical introduction to Duncan Forrester and offer a brief outline of developments in practical/public theology within the Scottish universities, between 1939 and 1978, when he was appointed to the Chair at New College. I then set out an overview of his major publications and trace some of the major themes and concerns in his work in the period 1978 to 2000. After this, I describe the establishment of CTPI and consider its programme and method in the years from 1984 to 2000.

The next sections trace the three themes of world, church and the church-world relation in Duncan Forrester's theology and question how Forrester's account of these themes has shaped the agenda of CTPI. Finally, I look at the debates with Hauerwas present in Forrester's writing and offer my own reading of the relationship between the work of the two theologians, as well as between the approach to theology advocated by Hauerwas and the methodology of CTPI.

Biographical Introduction to Duncan Forrester

Duncan Baillie¹ Forrester was born in Edinburgh on 10 November 1933. The family moved to St Andrews in 1935 when his father was appointed to the Chair of Practical Theology at the university there. He studied for an MA in Arts and Politics at St Andrews University from 1951 to 1955, where he was closely involved with the Student Christian Movement, part of local study groups and a regular attendee at Swanwick conferences. He spent a year at the University of Chicago from 1955 to 1956 and, after a year in industry working as a labourer in a shipyard in Govan and a steel mill in Sheffield², he returned to the University of Edinburgh where he took his BD between 1957 and 1960. He was ordained as a minister of the Church of Scotland in 1960 and, after a year as assistant at St James' Mission and Hillside Church in Edinburgh, went in 1961 to serve the Church of South India at Madras. He was Professor of Politics in Madras Christian College from 1962 to 1970³, when he returned to take up the post of Chaplain and Lecturer in Politics and Religious Studies at Sussex University, gaining his PhD there in 1976. In 1978 he was appointed to the Chair of Practical Theology and Christian Ethics at the University of Edinburgh, which he held until his retirement in 2000. From 1986 to 1996 he was Principal of New College and from 1996 to 1999, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity.

He has honorary degrees in Divinity from the Universities of Iceland, Glasgow and St Andrews and was awarded the Templeton Prize (UK) in 1999. From 1996 to 2000 he was a member of the Nuffield Commission on BioEthics.

¹ John and Donald Baillie were first cousins of Isabel Forrester (nee McColl), Duncan's mother. For more information on Isobel Forrester see the DNB entry by Lesley Orr MacDonald.

² Where he was involved with the programme of the Sheffield Industrial Mission under its famous founding figure E. (Ted) Wickham.

³ During a period of furlough in Scotland, he was a part-time lecturer in the department of politics at Edinburgh University.

The Scottish University Tradition in Public/Practical Theology – 1939 to 1978

No-one has ever held a chair in ‘Public Theology’ within Scotland.⁴ Theological chairs and lectureships have been held in Divinity, Practical Theology or Pastoral Theology, sometimes with Christian Ethics⁵ or, from the 1950s, Theology and Sociology attached. The role of the ancient divinity faculties in training candidates for the Church of Scotland ministry was paramount well into the second half of the twentieth century. This had a major influence on their hiring policies, pedagogy and curriculum.⁶

The idea of the modern research driven university only began to make a major impact on the teaching of theology in Scotland from the 1980s.⁷ The key concern driving appointments in Practical Theology prior to this was the need to educate ministerial candidates for the Church of Scotland, with training in homiletics, liturgy and sacraments and pastoral care at the centre of the Practical Theology curriculum.

Those appointed to positions within the divinity faculties typically stayed in post for decades, so that opportunities to diversify the curriculum were relatively slow in coming. A survey of those teaching Practical Theology between 1939 and 1978 reveals no-one among them who wrote or published any major work on church and society questions in Scotland in this period, with the exception of Robin Gill at Edinburgh from the mid 1970s.⁸ However, even Gill’s work at this

⁴ Following his ‘official’ retirement from New College, Duncan Forrester became Emeritus Chair of Theology and Public Issues in 2000

⁵ Forrester claims that “In the University of Edinburgh in the 1930s a chair was only allocated to practical theology on condition that it was linked with Christian ethics...[which was] seen as a respectable discipline, entitled to a place in the academy on the basis of an established methodology and intellectual track record.” Forrester 2000, TA, 45

⁶ For insights into the history of Scottish Divinity Faculties see Wright & Badcock eds. and Hazlett, I.

⁷ For background to the development of the Scottish Universities in the 20th century, see Lindsay Paterson’s *History of Education in Scotland*, Ch 9, Paterson 2003; Christopher Harvie also comments on the expansion of university provision in the 1960s in Harvie 1983, 153 and Harvie 2000, 150

⁸ When Duncan Forrester was a student a New College, the chair in Practical Theology (and the only full time post from 1945) was held by W.S. Tindal, a caring and compassionate figure, but one who seems from both Ian Fraser and Duncan Forrester’s accounts not to have given a great intellectual or theological lead to students. His successor James Blackie, who held the chair from 1966 to 1976 played an important role in overseeing the expansion of the New College department, with the arrival of Ian Gray (Christian Education and Homiletics), Peter Sissons, succeeded in 1972 by Robin Gill (Sociology of Religion) and Alastair Campbell 1969-(Pastoral Care and Medical Ethics). Edinburgh’s growing reputation in Practical Theology during James Blackie’s time was founded more on its important work in the area of Pastoral Care/Pastoral Studies, with only Robin Gill latterly working in the broader field of Church & Society or Theology and Politics.

early stage in his career was primarily focused on questions of method in relation to the inter-disciplinary relations between theology and sociology, with little concrete reflection on issues in Scottish society or culture.⁹

The widespread neglect of these questions among Reformed academic theologians in Scotland points up both the distinctiveness of the contribution made outwith the academy by Scottish Churches House in the 1960s¹⁰ and the seminal nature of Duncan Forrester's appointment to the New College Chair in 1978. Forrester's appointment marked a new era of academic theological engagement with social and political life in Scotland.¹¹ It also coincided with a surge of support for nationalism in Scotland, which led to the Devolution Referendum of 1979. The narrow vote for devolution did not lead to its enactment and the 1980s would then see a major investment of effort and intellect by many Scottish intellectuals and activists in either redeeming the devolution project or planning for moves to independence.¹² This was a phase of intellectual and political activity in which the churches and their theologians would be active and even prominent, but what is striking is how little intellectual and theological capital existed within the Scottish churches, even by the late 1970s, to underwrite this activity.

At Glasgow, the chair of Practical Theology was held by J. Pitt Watson from 1946 to 1963 and then by Murdo Ewan Macdonald from 1964 until his retirement in 1984, after which the chair was not filled again. David Millar was appointed as part-time Lecturer in Practical Theology in 1971 and served until 1990.

At Aberdeen, David Cairns was Professor of Practical Theology from 1947 to 1972 and was succeeded by Ian Pitt-Watson who held the chair until 1979 when he was succeeded by Alan Main. Christopher Wigglesworth was appointed as lecturer in 1979.

At St Andrews, the Chair in Practical Theology was held by W.R. Forrester (Duncan Forrester's father) from 1935 until 1958 and then by James Whyte from 1958 until J.D. Trotter was appointed as Lecturer in 1966, J.M. Keeling in 1972 and Steven Mackie in 1974.

⁹ Gill does subsequently turn his attention to more concrete Scottish themes contributing the paper on "The Scottish Churches in Urban Priority Areas" to the 1986 CTPI Seminar on the *Faith In The City* report, while Forrester addresses the report's theological method. See CTPI Occasional Paper 8, *Faith in the Scottish City*, pp14ff

¹⁰ The other major institution taking Church & Society questions seriously in these years was the Iona Community and related experiments such as The Gorbals Group. Evangelical Social Concern was still awaiting the new impetus provided by the Lausanne Movement from 1974 onwards.

¹¹ In his valedictory lecture at New College on June 10 2005, Forrester's successor in the Practical Theology Chair, Professor William Storrar confirmed this analysis in his characterisation of the three eras of Practical Theology at New College after 1966 in terms of the focus on Pastoral Care associated with James Blackie, the focus on Social and Political Theology associated with Duncan Forrester and a focus on Missiology in his own term from 2000-2005.

¹² Christopher Harvie sees the failed bid to introduce devolution as an intellectual and cultural catalyst within Scottish life and goes so far as to suggest that "The 1980s in Scotland were intellectually and culturally comparable not only with the 1920s but with the high years of the Scottish Enlightenment." Harvie 1994, 200

It is of course possible, that even though Reformed academics were not publishing in this area, they were teaching and lecturing in it and that this had a certain diffusive influence within their churches. But attempts to construct a reading list for a 1978 undergraduate course on Church and Nation/Church and Society, would have struggled to include any major work produced in Scotland by Reformed scholars in the previous three decades.¹³

Forrester's inaugural lecture delivered in October 1978 on his induction to the New College Chair was something of a *tour de force* – referencing classical traditions of relating theory and practice, the native Reformed tradition and newer traditions of ecumenism and liberation theology. It was a remarkably confident homecoming by someone who knew the traditions of Scottish divinity intimately. While Forrester, as the product of a Scottish Presbyterian theological and academic dynasty might seem to be the classic insider, he had been 'furth of' Scotland' for almost two decades and had been deeply radicalised by his experience in India and his subsequent reflection on that experience during his doctoral work. Here was a son of the Scottish Manse, Kirk, Academy and Divinity Hall returning with a mission to seek their transformation and renewal for the sake of the nation and the world in which they were set. Forrester's era at New College can therefore be seen as marking the politicisation of Practical Theology within Scotland, against the background of Thatcherite economic and social policies and in line with the broader cultivation of an intellectual resistance to the New Right across much of the Scottish intelligentsia.

Duncan Forrester's Publications

Aside from some very early dictionary style pieces in the *History of Political Philosophy*, most of Forrester's publications in the 1960s and 1970s were focused on politics and theology in the Indian context. From 1970, with his return to the UK, there was a change in emphasis, with his first SJT articles in

¹³ Said reading list could have included Ralph Morton's important and neglected 1951 missiology – *The Household of Faith*; Highet's two books from 1950 and 1960; Ian Fraser's 1959 *Bible Congregation & Community* and *Let's Get Moving* (1969). But none of these were by academic theologians and apart from Highet's volumes, the others are aimed at a more popular audience.

1972 on “The attack on Christendom in Marx and Kierkegaard” and 1976 on “Professor Hick and the Universe of Faiths”. His PhD thesis, a theological examination of the caste system, was published in 1980 as *Caste and Christianity*.

From the late 1970s, following his appointment to the Chair at Edinburgh, he began to publish more on ‘Practical Theology’ in a UK context. His published work after 1978 addresses four main areas: ‘method’ in practical theology, theology and social vision; liturgy and worship; and ecclesiology. Alongside this considerable body of externally published work, Forrester has contributed editorial introductions and substantive essays to many of the CTPI Discussion Papers.

His PhD research, published in 1980 as *Caste and Christianity*, addressed issues of caste within Indian society and how they might be engaged theologically. He argued that the stand taken against caste barriers by Christian missionaries had led to a large number of conversions from the poorest members of Indian society and to the involvement of missionaries in working to improve social conditions for these converts. This led them to embrace and preach an egalitarianism beyond anything embraced in their sending churches.¹⁴ In the same year as his PhD thesis was published, Forrester’s inaugural New College lecture in Practical Theology was published in the Scottish Journal of Theology as “Divinity In Use and Practice”.¹⁵ The lecture represented a confident methodological manifesto which aimed to provide Practical Theology at Edinburgh with a clear sense of its own identity as a ‘primary’ discipline within the Faculty of Divinity. It announced Practical Theology as a ‘post-colonial’ discipline with a global horizon. It made clear its refusal to confine its concern for practice to the internal practices of the church, while insisting on the centrality of worship in relation to all practice. It signalled from the start its strong affinity with liberation theology and its commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue, in particular with the social sciences. It declared its intention to work for “radical social

¹⁴ This summary is based on Forrester’s own in his 1979 article, “The Ecumenical Renovation of the Gospel” pp42-44

¹⁵ SJT 1980 Vol 33 pp1-11

change". It made very clear its continuing debt to Reinhold Niebuhr. Finally, in commending itself to the academy, it unabashedly situated its entire endeavour in relation to the eschatological horizon of faith – its purpose was to 'fit us for heaven'.

If this inaugural lecture was, to use a favourite Forrester image, the *arrabon* or *antipast*, its' fuller realisation was to come in 1984, with the establishment of CTPI and in 1985 with the publication of Forrester's second, sole-authored book, *Christianity and The Future of Welfare*. The years between had witnessed what was felt by Forrester and many others with him to be a methodological shaking of the foundations, with the publication in 1981 of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. Forrester was to be profoundly influenced by *After Virtue*, much later he would question whether he was not overly influenced by it.¹⁶ The creation of CTPI can itself be understood as a methodological statement. Forrester's manifesto for a new relationship between theology and action, particularly in relation to the pursuit of social change and 'world transforming political praxis' as well as his commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue required a vehicle through which it could be enacted. It required a new academic *praxis* if it was to be true to its own *theoria*. CTPI was therefore a crucial expression of academic praxis, which because it did not exist, had to be invented. In that sense, the Centre itself sought to function as a methodological supplement to the Faculty of Divinity.

Christianity and the Future of Welfare (1985) his second sole-authored book and his first publication after the establishment of CTPI in 1984, is a crucial text for understanding Forrester's project in the early years at Edinburgh.

It offered a critical reading of the history of the welfare state in Britain, celebrating the wartime vision which led to its establishment and noting the way in which it was then sustained by a cross-party consensus until the economic downturn of the 1970s. Arguing forcefully that the outcome of the contemporary (early 80s) debate about welfare would shape British society "for at least a generation", the book was a plea for Christians to "join in the debate" about the

¹⁶ Interview One with Duncan Forrester.

future of welfare in the way they had joined it at the creation of the post-war welfare state. *Christianity and Social Welfare* was the most important work in Scottish social theology for a generation, since the publication of the Baillie Commission reports in 1945. In terms of methodology, it was clearly self-conscious about the need to 'bridge' the gap in the tradition and Forrester makes it clear that the key figures and influences he is relating to are R. H. Tawney, William Temple and John Baillie. He identifies each of them with a key methodological move: Tawney with an affirmation of the key role played by Christian values; Temple with a commitment to develop policies which expressed those values; and Baillie with a drive to mobilize church support for the policies.¹⁷ Forrester affirms the continuing relevance of each of these contributions, but argues that the 'middle axiom' approach, coined by J.H. Oldham and taken up by Temple and Baillie (though not by Tawney, despite his closeness to Temple) is no longer viable. He criticises 'middle axioms' for their high level of generality, their elitism and their dependency on a Christian consensus in society.¹⁸ The changed context of the 1980s calls for a new method in social theology which will embrace the insights of liberation theology, involving the poor and powerless in debates about their future.¹⁹

It is significant that Forrester here appealed directly to that generation for inspiration; the implication of his historical reading was that the years of 'Butskellite'²⁰ consensus in British politics had also witnessed a theological complacency about making the case for Christian involvement in social policy. This had left the churches in the 1980s unprepared to face the challenge of the New Right, whose possessive individualism, over-promotion of the market and disavowal of equality was fiercely criticised here.²¹

The book also showed the first signs of the powerful impact made by Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* on Forrester's thinking. Rejecting John Rawls case for a

¹⁷ Forrester 1985, CFW, 26

¹⁸ Forrester 1985, CFW, 88-91

¹⁹ Forrester 1985, CFW, p92

²⁰ This compound term from the names of Tory politician Rab Butler and Labour politician, Hugh Gaitskell was coined to emphasise the degree of cross-party consensus on issues such as the welfare state in the post-war decades.

²¹ The book can be compared with the proceedings of the CTPI Seminar of 13 Feb 1985 on 'The New Right and Christian Values', published as CTPI Discussion Paper 5. Forrester contributes the introduction, noting here the links between New Right theorists and the Scottish Enlightenment.

disinterestedly 'rational' account of justice,²² Forrester argued that programmes and policies aiming at economic justice needed to be based in a social vision which arose out of Christian faith.²³ He invoked the legacy of Tawney in particular, arguing the need for a new effort among theologians and Christian intellectuals to make the case for equality over again in the new circumstances of Thatcher's Britain. This needed to be supplemented by Temple-like alliances of experts in sociology and economics in order to move from vision to policy and a Baillie-like drive for the conversion of Christian opinion within the churches.²⁴ New thinking about welfare was needed and the future of welfare would involve greater diversity of providers, with less expected of the state. However, he argued that for Christians the welfare state, with all its flaws, had been an anticipation of the *shalom* of the coming Kingdom of God. Faced with "the intellectual bankruptcy of the Left and callous intellectual vigour of the Right"²⁵, the churches must work towards a renewed vision of a 'welfare society', where Titmuss's "gift relationship" could flourish.²⁶

Christianity and the Future of Welfare is a powerful, fluent and closely argued text, which still resonates with many contemporary concerns twenty years on. It combined an articulate Reformed and ecumenical theological sensibility with a confident reading of political theory and economy. It was the breakthrough book in terms of establishing Forrester's voice in UK and Scottish social theology. In 1985, that voice was offering a strongly argued polemic against Thatcherism.²⁷ While he made some criticisms of the British and American Left, there was no attempt at neutrality. There were, he believed, some things to be learned from the work of the New Right, but their vision of society and their understanding of Christianity ought to be vigorously opposed. In this text, Forrester identified himself as one of those in the political wilderness, who must think and work and renew the vision until a different political regime came to power.²⁸

²² Forrester 1985, CFW, 84-5

²³ Forrester, 1985, CFW, 85

²⁴ Forrester 1985, CFW, 88

²⁵ Forrester 1985 CFW, 100

²⁶ The sociologist Richard Titmuss published *The Gift Relationship* in

²⁷ Forrester 1985, CFW 68: "Mrs Thatcher's populist doctrine is one which systematically benefits the rich and soaks the poor. It conflicts at major points with the main thrust of Christian social teaching."

²⁸ Forrester 1985, CFW 80

Forrester's concerns about method also surfaced in a 1986 CTPI seminar called "Faith in the Scottish City", held in response to the Church of England's *Faith In The City* report, with the Chair of the Archbishop's Commission among the keynote speakers. Duncan Forrester offered a stinging critical paper on "The Theology of the Report"²⁹, which made few concessions to academic or ecumenical sensitivities: the *explicit* theology of the report was "bland in a distinctively Anglican way", "academic in the sense of being detached", "hardly capable of throwing light on the great issues addressed" and having "little of importance to say".³⁰ He accuses it of being overly tentative and representing the anaemic theology of the senior common room.³¹ It showed "how lamentably we academic theologians have failed the church by neglecting to provide a theology which engages with contemporary reality".³² His final counter-example was of Reinhold Niebuhr, fifty years before, standing "in this very room" delivering the Gifford Lectures. Read today the language of Forrester's paper is strong and even intemperate. It was given in a CTPI seminar which very consciously included programmed contributions from two women living in Scottish UPA's. But perhaps the *Faith In The City* report was too easy a target – it was certainly a big one. CTPI's own consultations through the early and mid 1980s would themselves have a generous representation of the senior common room speaking from the front. The appeal to Niebuhr was also a surprising trump card to produce, given the theological and political criticisms of Niebuhr's 'realism' which had been emerging from liberation theologians, amongst others.³³ What the 1986 paper shows, is how passionate Forrester had become about the importance of method, about the capacity of misguided methods to weaken the church's contribution to the public sphere and about the importance of UK social theology looking to Liberation Theology for a methodological corrective.

²⁹ Published in CTPI Occasional Paper no 8, *Faith In The Scottish City*.

³⁰ CTPI Occasional Paper 8, 11

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ While an older generation remember Niebuhr as a 'Christian Socialist', the more recent history of the reception of his thought shows his popularity among neo-conservatives, particularly in the field of international relations.

It is also important to note that *Christianity and the Future of Welfare* was published, and the *Faith In The Scottish City* seminar was held, while Forrester was actively engaged in a project which he believed was modelling a new method for social theology. In 1984, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had instructed the Church & Nation Committee to prepare a report on the spiritual issues involved in the Distribution of Wealth, Income & Benefits in Scotland. Duncan Forrester was appointed as convenor of the Working Group and was clearly a key influence on its methodology and the guiding hand in the drafting of the report. This was, in effect, the nearest Forrester would come to a Baillie Commission moment in his career, though it was undertaken in a somewhat narrower compass. The working group was established on an interdisciplinary basis, drawing together academic theologians, parish ministers and industrial chaplains with relevant experience alongside lay people with expertise in economics and social policy (though “none of us was poor”). It met initially over two years, from 1984 to 1986, gathering data and taking evidence from expert witnesses, but also visiting areas of acute deprivation within Scotland and listening to the views and experiences of people living in poverty. The Working Group then produced an interim report which went to the 1986 General Assembly and was commended to congregations and Kirk Sessions for further discussion. After consideration of comments on the interim report, the full report was completed early in 1988, published (with Forrester credited as joint editor³⁴) by Epworth as *Just Sharing – A Christian Approach to the Distribution of Wealth, Income and Benefits* and presented to the 1988 General Assembly.

The final shape of the report gives an important insight into Forrester’s preferred methodology for this type of church-report social theology.³⁵

It was presented in three main sections: it began with a series of personal testimonies and case studies of people’s *experiences* of distribution, before

³⁴ Clearly he must have drafted a great deal of the final report, whose prose is scattered with trademark quotes and illustrations familiar from his previous work.

³⁵ In a 1996 reflection, Forrester wrote that “*Just Sharing* in its basic structure reflects clearly the approach of the Centre. First comes a serious engagement with experience, followed by an analysis of the situation with the help of social science. Only then comes a sustained theological reflection in which a serious attempt is made to translate the material out of technical academic jargon into a language which is generally accessible.” Wright & Badcock ed. 1996, 269

setting out *facts* and figures about the distribution of wealth in Scotland in the mid 1980s. It then moved to *reflection and interpretation*, based on the Bible and Christian tradition. Finally it considered what *response* should be made, arguing for a three-fold response in terms of personal life-style, the life of the church and public policy. The final section of the report on public policy set out an 8 point 'agenda' for a Great Debate about distribution within Scottish/UK society and made 5 specific recommendations for action on urgent priorities. What does this structure tell us about Forrester's method?

The methodology which is on view here places a high value on the subjectivity of all those involved (there were personal testimonies from middle class members of the working group) and especially the subjectivity of the poor. They are not just to be treated as 'objects' of study or investigation, they are to be engaged and represented as full subjects, whose voices are to be heard in their own terms within the body of the report. This is where the report begins. The lived experience of the poor cannot be an afterthought, it should provide an initial orientation for those seeking to reflect on it.

The methodology also reflected a recognition of the need to *go to* the people rather than attempting to *call* them to give testimony. The physical location of experts and professionals who almost always live at a physical remove from poverty was a material factor which distanced them emotionally and politically from 'the poor'.

The second section, we are told at one point in the introduction, deals with "facts" as opposed to the "experiences" of the first section. Here, the contributions of social scientists and researchers come to the fore, offering us the hard data of "facts and figures". Elsewhere, however, these first two sections seem to be contrasted with the third section, so we also read "Our first task was to *face the facts*...We then moved on to *reflection and interpretation*".³⁶ This example raises a recurring difficulty with Forrester's approach which deserves further attention: his regular appeal to "facts". Writing in 2004, Andrew Morton refers to him as "a stickler for empirical evidence"³⁷; in 1989 he refers to

³⁶ Forrester ed. 1988, ix

³⁷ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 26

his own insistence on a dogged reverence for the facts.³⁸ In 1988, he writes that:

A theology which strives to be contextual must understand its context. That means, in the first place, that it looks the facts in the face, that it relates to things as they are rather than some imaginary or unreal world.³⁹

The language clearly has a rhetorical appeal which he finds hard to resist; however, it is problematic, not least because elsewhere he seems to want to disavow precisely this kind of naïve empiricism or objectivism. For example, writing in 1988, he rejected Peter Berger's criticism of distortion/bias in the method of "conscientization" advocated by Paulo Freire⁴⁰ on the grounds that "no ideological innocence of the sort Berger appears to be advocating is possible".⁴¹ Here Forrester seems to accept that there can be no simple, unmediated access to 'the facts'. If this is his more definitive position (as we might expect from someone who acknowledges MacIntyre as a major influence) then his fondness for the rhetoric of empiricism is clearly inconsistent. I suspect that Forrester is 'in fact', thoroughly ambivalent about this question and that his approach reflects a running internal argument in which MacIntyrean post-liberal vies with unreconstructed 1950s empirical social scientist and 'scientific Marxist'. If you like, his heart is modernist about 'facts' while his head is 'postmodern' and both have a say in the methodological outcome.

In the context of the *Just Sharing* report, this problem is exemplified by the contrast between "experience" and "fact" on the one hand and between "fact" and "reflection"/"interpretation" on the other. The result is that the theology/social science relationship modelled in the report begs key methodological questions – the kind of questions which two years later, will be a target of John Milbank's critique in *Theology and Social Theory*.⁴²

³⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, viii

³⁹ Forrester 1988, TP, 155

⁴⁰ Freire visited CTPI in May 1988 and gave a seminar there

⁴¹ Forrester 1988, TP, 156

⁴² Milbank 1990

A final methodological query about *Just Sharing* concerns the extent to which, in the end, it does present a distinct alternative to ‘middle axiom’ thinking. Certainly, the report allows the voices of the poor to be heard; it acknowledges the church’s minority position within society and does not assume a Christian consensus; it also ends with some detailed and concrete “urgent” policy recommendations. However, while the poor are heard, the experts and the theology/policy elite are still steering the process. There is also a case to be made that the principles set out in the *reflection* section and the “Agenda” for a Great Debate about distribution remain closer to the level of “generality” which Forrester criticises in ‘middle axiom’ approaches, than would appear to be comfortable, given the nature of his verdict on that method. It seems that Forrester may finally be more ‘thirled’ to and implicated in aspects of ‘middle axiom’ thinking than he wants to accept. His distancing may be more realised at the level of critique than it is in the fashioning of a revised methodology. The *Just Sharing* report has achieved a certain symbolic status through its having been publicly presented to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by the Moderator at the 1988 General Assembly after her ‘Sermon on the Mound’.⁴³ Looking back on this publication in 2003, Forrester wrote:

The radical strand in the Scottish tradition of social theology has always emphasised the necessity for theology and the church to offer a distinctive and strongly biblical and confessional contribution to public life. It still shows itself today in a sometimes quite obsessive determination in the Church of Scotland to ground its public statements in the Bible. At its best this results in the church making a recognised and significant contribution to public debate as did.... the report of a Church and Nation working party on the distribution of wealth, income and benefits, published as *Just Sharing* in 1988. This book attempted to ground its work in theological and biblical reflection and saw this as its distinctive service in this area. *Just Sharing* was presented to Mrs Thatcher by the Moderator at the conclusion of her famous ‘Sermon on the Mound’ in 1988 as a kind of challenge to Thatcherite orthodoxy.⁴⁴

⁴³ Historian Christopher Harvie commented on this episode: “Mrs Thatcher’s performance before the General Assembly of 1988 was a disaster, less for her speech than for an earlier interview in a women’s magazine, in which she uttered the line ‘there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families’.” The Assembly coincided with a report of the Church and Nation committee on urban deprivation [sic] and the Moderator, Rev Prof J.H. Whyte of St Andrews, a figure very much in the tradition of John Baillie and the social reformers of World War II, ceremonially handed her a copy of it. With the Poll Tax seemingly in breach of the Act of Union and likely to make the poor poorer, the Kirk’s wrath was roused as it had seldom been since the days of the Disruption.” Harvie 1994, 235

⁴⁴ Storrar & Donald ed. 2003, 92

Both *Just Sharing* and *The Future of Welfare* aimed at a similar cluster of issues: the role of the state in social welfare; the role of the market in human society; the question of whether and how equality should be a goal of social policy; the way in which poverty was to be defined and responded to within Britain/Scotland. Both, it could be said, were very close to being the Labour Party at prayer.

In 1988, Forrester also published what may be his most widely known and widely read work, *Theology and Politics* in which he identified a spectrum of possibilities for political theology ranging from the Eusebian, through the Augustinian, to the position associated with Tertullian.⁴⁵ His (very Protestant) survey of the history of Christendom was critical of the Lutheran contribution⁴⁶ and more appreciative of Calvinist emphases, following Tawney in his account of the privatization of European Christianity since the Enlightenment.⁴⁷ In the 20th century, he valorised the example offered by Barth and Bonhoeffer and was strongly critical of the subsequent ‘secular theologies’ of the 1960s. He begins here to pay more attention to the European political theology, of which Moltmann and Metz were leading representatives, noting that it aimed to be “practical, public and critical”.⁴⁸ In terms of method, however, he argues that political theology has not articulated the theory-practice relation as well as liberation theology:

Both Western political theology and liberation theology see the need to relate theory and practice more closely and explicitly than has been common in most modern academic theology.... in Western political theology, practice is often seen as derived from theory and lacking a dignity of its own. Theology may be understood as driving people to practice. but, the theology itself, even if stimulated by contemporary social and political questions, remains general, apparently independent of its context and ahistorical.⁴⁹

Forrester also quotes at length from Joseph Comblin’s “fascinating and aggressive” attack on Western academic theology, including his contention that “a central problem of academic theology is that it is distanced from the real life

⁴⁵ Forrester 1988, TP, Ch 1

⁴⁶ “Luther depoliticised the Christian faith.” Forrester 1988, TP 30; on Calvin see pp32-34 “The Calvinist tradition makes possible a distinctively Christian political theology which addresses the political order on the basis of revealed truth.” (33)

⁴⁷ Tawney’s 1926 book on *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*; In his 1997 work *Christian Justice and Public Policy*, Forrester later distanced himself from aspects of Tawney’s historical interpretation, while remaining a strong supporter of his overall political philosophy. Forrester 1997, CJPP, 18

⁴⁸ Forrester 1998, TP 58-9

⁴⁹ Forrester 1998, TP, 60

of the grassroots church and from the problems of the world”.⁵⁰ Overall, the burden of *Theology and Politics* in relation to method remains Forrester’s conviction about the need for a major ‘paradigm shift’ within theology and his belief that this shift must be towards the approach and methods of liberation theology.⁵¹ In line with this, it was the examples of Latin American liberation theology since the late 1960s which came to dominate the book. Forrester displayed a close acquaintance with the writings of liberation theologians and offered a detailed and somewhat uncritical defence of their methods. From the third chapter, while still ostensibly describing and illustrating the approach of liberation theology, the book effectively offered a strong endorsement of its methods and concerns. The effect of this, while offering a powerful articulation of the value of liberation theology, was to drastically limit the space offered to discussion of other political theologies and specifically to questions of the future of liberal democracy in plural societies. There was little discussion of the dialogue between theology and socialism/Marxism in Europe and no discussion of nationalism or emerging debates about the role of the state. This was particularly surprising given the degree of attention which was then being paid to questions of devolution and nationalism within 1980s Scotland. The book’s major flaw was its tendency to reduce ‘politics’ to the struggle for *justice*, with little or no attention given to questions of *authority* or *legitimacy*.⁵² It was also weakened by its failure to articulate the growing importance of a more differentiated and culturally particular understanding of social justice, which paid greater attention to issues of gender and ethnicity. Forrester’s approach, in this respect, mirrored mainstream Marxist presumptions that ‘class’ was the fundamental analytical category, just as those presumptions were becoming widely challenged within debates about political theory within the New Left. A notable lack in the book is any engagement with feminist, womanist or *mujerista*

⁵⁰ Forrester 1988, TP 63

⁵¹ The book also contains a robust methodological commentary on T.F. Torrance’s attempts to produce a political theology of modern Israel; Forrester accuses him of “simplistic and ill-conceived exegesis”. Forrester 1988, TP, 87

⁵² The key study which remedies this is Oliver O’Donovan’s 1996 *The Desire of Nations*, which cites *Theology and Politics* at several points. This weighting of Forrester’s concerns also goes some way to explaining his persistently British focus, since for the most part, the welfare and social security issues which he has devoted much attention to have operated on a UK wide basis.

theology, which he does not register as ‘political theologies’ distinct from or allied to the types he mentions. Forrester made his first references here to the work of Lesslie Newbigin, in particular to his seminal 1983 book *The Other Side of 1984*.⁵³

In retrospect, 1988 was an awkward year to publish a book on *Theology and Politics*. The Left in Britain and America were in the political wilderness during the Thatcher-Reagan era, while the influence of the first wave of Liberation Theology was at its height in Western seminaries and universities, but was coinciding with a new intellectual whirlwind of postmodernism. Most of all, the geo-political landscape was about to be transformed with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, events which would mark the beginning of an intense period of re-evaluating Marxism and re-thinking the project of the Left.

In *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, the Hensley Henson Lectures delivered in Oxford in 1987-88 and published in 1989, Forrester presented his most developed reflections on theological method up to this point. In particular, in a section affirming the importance of Karl Barth as a model, he resisted the limiting nature of privatized or narrowly academic accounts of theology and offered a robust defence of the relation between theology and church:

A theology which is capable of addressing issues of public policy has perforce to be a *church* theology. It is not a free-floating theory or a detached ideology. It is rooted not just in a community of scholars but in a believing fellowship which, while it may transcend space and time, has a *face* (or rather faces) in our land. This fellowship is also a community of moral discourse which among other things, concerns itself with social values, goals and norms. Theology, however, is more than the mouthpiece of the church or its magisterium... it has a clear responsibility both to take part in discussion within the church and to contribute to public debate even when it cannot do so as an authorized mouthpiece for the institutional church. ...There is or ought to be, a critical solidarity between church and theology.⁵⁴

Here Forrester links the narrowing vision of theology within the academy to “the decline in the numbers and influence of the church”. Under these conditions, theology tends to justify itself as an ‘objective’ or phenomenological investigation

⁵³ In this book Newbigin began his new phase of writing on a missiology of the West; reflecting the influence of MacIntyre and strongly critical of the legacy of the European Enlightenment.

⁵⁴ Forrester 1989, BVP, 13-14

into Christianity as a religious tradition which has shaped Western culture. It is, on this account, an academic subject just like classics or ancient history. This view of theology, he believes, deprives it of its role in “engaging with a fundamental, but increasingly neglected, dimension of contemporary public truth”.⁵⁵ However, he also saw positive possibilities for theology in the declining status of the church within the social system, which may offer opportunities to recover a greater “authenticity” as the church is set free to *be* the church.⁵⁶ Significantly, he defined his own task in *Beliefs, Values and Policies* in the words of American theological ethicist Paul Ramsey:

There is an urgent need, and now is the time, for those of us who love the Church and who share in striving for an ecumenical ethics in the world of today, to engage in a probing examination of what we are doing (and consequently failing to do) in formulating the Church’s address to the world.⁵⁷

Forrester’s position here combines the Barthian stress on theology as *Church* Dogmatics, with the emphasis within Liberation Theology on the church as the community which is called to anchor theology in the world of the poor. It is a position which resonates strongly with the Scottish tradition of Divinity and with his own position in a Chair which has always been held by a serving Church of Scotland Minister. It was, however, a position which was increasingly difficult to defend within the academy, within a Scottish university system which already accepted an overwhelmingly ‘secular’ and even ‘secularist’ definition of its own identity. The other consequence of the deepening decline of the Church of Scotland in particular, which Forrester does not address here, is the question of whether the historic settlement between Church and Universities could be maintained in ways which would allow Professors of Practical Theology to define the method and accountability of theology in this fashion, as a means whereby “those who love the Church” engaged in “formulating the church’s address to the world”?

⁵⁵ Forrester 1989, BVP, 14

⁵⁶ The phrase echoes the message of the 1937 Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State.

⁵⁷ Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church? A Critique of the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society*, Edinburgh, 1969, pp19-20

In *Beliefs, Values and Policies* Forrester also returned to the question of ‘middle axioms’ – the method proposed by J.H. Oldham and applied by William Temple and John Baillie among others, which became “the accepted currency of ecumenical social ethics for a generation”.⁵⁸ Although, as we have seen, Forrester had previously set out a critique of ‘middle axioms’ in his 1985 *Christianity and the Future of Welfare*, this fuller treatment is the passage he refers back to in his later writings. He argues here that:

The middle-axiom method encompasses, as we shall see, a *procedure* in ecumenical social ethics (which we argue should be affirmed, with some important modifications) and a *logic* of the proper relationship of theology and public policy (which we will question).⁵⁹

The *procedure* for “doing ecumenical social ethics”/“developing a Christian approach to matters of public policy”⁶⁰ involved gathering groups of experts and practitioners from relevant fields to analyse and address the matter in hand alongwith theologians and church leaders.⁶¹ It was intentionally interdisciplinary and ecumenical, seeking to overcome intellectual and theological competition and fragmentation.⁶² It did not however address issues of social elitism and exclusion and Forrester insists the procedure needs to be corrected by a liberationist emphasis on the involvement of the poor. While he strongly affirmed the ecumenical character of the middle axiom procedure arguing in particular that “it is no longer plausible to sustain or revive confessional systems of social ethics”,⁶³ he worried that the role of theology in groups adopting this approach had often been short-changed. Following Ian Ramsey, who had been actively involved in this ‘Oldham’ type of group, he emphasised the need for a dual ‘classical’ and ‘contextual’ theological input to the group process.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, 16; Forrester had previously addressed the subject of middle axioms and set out a brief critique of them in his 1985 book *Christianity and the Future of Welfare*. see Forrester 1985, CFW, pp88-91

⁵⁹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 17

⁶⁰ Forrester’s wording here shows that he regards the two activities as synonymous.

⁶¹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 17

⁶² Forrester 1989, BVP, 18

⁶³ Forrester 1989, BVP, 18

⁶⁴ Forrester 1989, BVP, 19; Forrester cites the 1987 Anglican BSR Report *Changing Britain* as an example of what happens “when a working party consciously and explicitly eschews serious theological reflection: it falls back unconsciously on alternative dogmas, in this case, those of rather out-of-date sociology”. Forrester 1989, BVP, 45

A further observation was that the elite consensus optimistically envisaged by Oldham seemed increasingly hard to secure – here he cites as evidence the failure of 1982 British Council of Churches Working Party on Poverty (chaired by Forrester’s friend Raymond Plant) to produce an agreed report and the inconclusive outcome of a 1984 Anglican Board of Social Responsibility study of economic theory. This lack of consensus may also, he suggested, signal a failure to develop the theological dimension of such groups in sufficient depth.⁶⁵

The *logic* of the ‘Oldham method’ of doing social ethics was that ‘mediation’ was necessary between basic Christian principles and their specific application in social policy. Forrester identifies four stages in this mediation: a general Christian confession; the identification of fundamental ethical principles; middle axioms which combine theology and empirical analysis; and finally the implementation of such axioms in specific situations.⁶⁶ However, he now offers a series of criticisms which go beyond the 1985 analysis. In addition to the ‘liberationist’ complaint that the approach was overly deductive and insufficiently dialectical, he offers the more ‘MacIntyrean’ criticism that it overdrew the fact-value distinction and distorted the relationship between theology and the social sciences⁶⁷. A new line of critique, which reflects the growing influence of MacIntyre (by this stage Forrester was also responding to the argument of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) as well as the “exciting narrative ethics” of James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas⁶⁸, introduces the language of ‘narrative’ into his methodology for the first time. Forrester now argues that in its tendency to abstraction, the middle axiom approach diminished the ‘indicative’ function of the Christian story.⁶⁹ It therefore needs the corrective of ‘narrative ethics’, in which ethics is continually renewed by the resources of tradition and memory.⁷⁰ The assertion that “the narrative *contains* the imperative” is seen as

⁶⁵ Forrester 1989, BVP, 21-22

⁶⁶ Forrester 1989, BVP, 24-25

⁶⁷ But see the comments above on Forrester’s fondness for the rhetoric of empiricism, which persists beyond this 1989 analysis.

⁶⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, 29

⁶⁹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 27-28

⁷⁰ Forrester 1989, BVP, 29

implicit in Barth's understanding of dogmatics as ethics.⁷¹ Without this narrative dimension, Forrester concludes, middle axiom thinking 'filters out the distinctiveness' of Christian ethics and leads to 'vacuity' and generality.⁷²

Forrester appeals here to Tawney as someone who never identified himself with middle axiom thinking and insisted the churches ought to speak their minds fearlessly about specific issues. He detects signs of change in the departure of *The Church and the Bomb* (1982) and *Faith In The City* (1985) reports from middle axiom thinking and their willingness to make specific policy proposals.⁷³ Overall, with the idea of a Christian consensus a thing of the past "we now need to look for a way of contributing to public debate which no longer takes it for granted that Britain is a Christian society".⁷⁴

In its embrace of the language of narrative, *Beliefs, Values and Policies* represents a significant development in Forrester's method. However, it is questionable how far the various lines of influence are being effectively integrated. After these lectures, there is an extended pause in Forrester's output, with little new on theological method until 1994.⁷⁵ This pause is significant because it coincides with the massive geo-political and ideological shifts of 1989. As a practical/political theologian strongly identified with the Left and openly committed to commending the insights of Liberation Theology, Forrester was bound to be affected by the global reconsideration of the Marxist/Socialist project in the years after 1989.

In 1994 Forrester published his first explicit reflections on the post 1989 situation. He considers the implications for theological method of a reappraisal

⁷¹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 30

⁷² Forrester 1989, BVP, 31-32

⁷³ Forrester 1989, BVP 32-33; later, in response to the example of Oscar Romero, Forrester writes: "Generalities are not enough. We must respond to the specific situation in which we find ourselves and relate to the real neighbour and challenge the actual oppressor." Forrester 1989, BVP, 58

⁷⁴ Forrester 1989, BVP, 34

⁷⁵ Forrester published a revised version of his inaugural lecture "Divinity In Use and Practice" [SJT 1980] under the same title in his edited 1990 collection *Theology and Practice*. Forrester 1990, TPr 9; Sometime between 1987 and 1992, he wrote an important reflection on "John Baillie as a social theologian" which appears as Ch 10 in a 1993 volume of essays on the Baillie brothers. Fergusson ed. 1993

of the contribution to be made by Marxist theory and the social sciences in a review article in the SJT: “Can Liberation Theology survive 1989?”. Forrester’s answer was in the affirmative, but reflected a more chastened sense of how the project of liberation theology needed revision in contrast to the analysis of Alastair Kee⁷⁶, which advocated a purified and emboldened application of Marxism, purged of the mythological trappings of popular religion. Forrester is sympathetic to those who advocate a new dialogue with liberalism and its communitarian critics, while rejecting Milbank’s radical critique of ‘social theory’ and continuing to promote a mutually corrective alliance of “critical solidarity” between theology and the social sciences.⁷⁷ Accepting that the grand synthesis of Marxism and theology foreseen by some in the 1980s was no longer viable, Forrester defends a continuing role for the social sciences with a more ‘fragmentary’ contribution from what can be salvaged from the wreckage of the Marxist project 1918-1989.⁷⁸

Forrester’s output on ‘social theology’ slowed in the 1990s as he became closely involved in the WCC Ecclesiology and Ethics programme and wrote more on ecclesiology. However, a 1991 article in the *Journal of Social Ethics* had signalled a closer focus on competing accounts of ‘justice’, again reflecting the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre and in particular his 1988 question “Whose Justice?” Forrester’s response to this question became the major 1997 work *Christian Justice and Public Policy*, his ‘biggest’ book since the 1980 book of his PhD thesis, published as part of the series of ‘Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion’ of which he was General Editor with Alistair Kee.

Christian Justice and Public Policy aimed to explore “the possibility that theology, might have, even in a pluralist secular society, a constructive and questioning contribution to make both to the theoretical discussions which undergird policy and to policy-making itself”⁷⁹. A significant feature of this book

⁷⁶ Kee’s post 1989 response *Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (SCM 1990) is one of the main books discussed by Forrester in this article. SJT 47 pp248ff; Kee was by this time a colleague of Forrester’s at New College, having been appointed to the Chair of Religious Studies in 1991

⁷⁷ SJT 47, 252

⁷⁸ Forrester 1994, SJT 47, 253

⁷⁹ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 36

was a far greater engagement with feminist theory and theology than had previously been evident in his work. This greater attention to feminist thinkers had the effect of highlighting the extent to which this perspective had been virtually absent in the previous two decades.⁸⁰ It drew attention to the way in which the liberation emphasis on a method which began with the experiences of the poor and the excluded had, in much of Forrester's work, been weighted against the concrete experience of women and also to the way in which his power as an academic host of conferences and consultations had tended to be exercised in favour of attending to the voices of male academics and practitioners.⁸¹ When Forrester draws on the work of Sylvia Binnhabib to produce a 'MacIntyrean' critique of Habermas' conception of the 'public sphere', there is therefore a real and largely unacknowledged sense in which her voice also speaks against the operative definition of 'public issues' at CTPI in the previous decade.⁸²

Another notable feature of the book in relation to methodology, was that Forrester offered for the first time some extended reflections on the concept of 'public theology' – tracing the emergence of the term within North America, as an alternative to European 'political theology' and Latin American 'liberation theology'.⁸³ Forrester's response to the term was ambivalent. He was clearly suspicious of its credentials, noting that:

This kind of 'public theology' has been criticised on a number of grounds. Liberationists regard it as little more than an ideological defence of capitalism, a kind of syncretism between Christianity and the mammon worship which they see as characteristic of modern industrial societies. Political theologians believe it is inadequately critical and see it as domesticated in the dominant culture. Others suggest that public theology has forgotten that the first task of the church is to *be* the church and thereby witness to an alternative, coherent set of beliefs and values in a world that has become disastrously fragmented.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Prior to this 1997 book, there were no citations of feminist thinkers (in fact, virtually no citations from women) in any of his writings.

⁸¹ This point could also be made in relation to a survey of keynote speakers at CTPI events from 1984 on. With a few important exceptions, the list is overwhelmingly male!

⁸² Forrester 1997, 20

⁸³ Forrester cites the importance of David Tracy's 1981 book *The Analogical Imagination* with its 3 publics of society, academy and church and Jeffrey Stout's 1988 *Ethics After Babel* in the growing currency of the term 'public theology'. c.f. Forrester 1997, CJPP, 31-32

⁸⁴ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 35

In what might appear to be a decisive rejection of the new ‘public theology’ of Thiemann, Stackhouse et al. he spells out his own sympathies very directly:

This last position, associated today particularly with names like Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, George Lindbeck and Hans Frei is that with which I have most sympathy. If a choice were necessary, this is the position with which I would identify.⁸⁵

The ambivalence arises because, despite this apparent rejection of the term, later in the volume he declared “My own conviction is that all serious theology must be public theology”.⁸⁶ Behind this apparent contradiction, there would seem to lie a decision to contest the ownership of the term itself. Despite his reservations about the leading figures in North America who have used it to identify their project, and despite his never having laid claim to it in this form to name his own approach, Forrester has too much invested in the qualifier ‘public’ to accept any one group of theologians ‘copyrighting’ it.⁸⁷ The ‘public theologians’, he seems to be saying, need to be challenged with the ‘post-liberal’ critique; but in bringing this challenge, he wants the ‘post-liberals’ to be insisting that they have their own claim to the term. The book’s introduction therefore billed him as making “a timely contribution to a *new* public theology”.⁸⁸ Here we find chapter-length critiques of Rawls and Hayek, whose work had attracted Forrester’s critical attention from the early 1980s, but receives more developed treatment here. It also included a chapter on Habermas whose work had not been addressed in any detail by Forrester in previous publications. In this book we also find Forrester in a new and less combative voice, sounding increasingly confident that the wilderness years of the British Left were coming to an end and looking beyond the new Right’s interest in theological endorsement to note the emergence of “a similar development on the Left”:

⁸⁵ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 35

⁸⁶ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 200

⁸⁷ The naming of CTPI in 1984, his 1985 chapter on “The Public Church” in *Christianity and the Future of Welfare*;

⁸⁸ Emphasis added – perhaps ironically, 1997 was also the year of ‘New’ Labour; In support of this reading, I would also cite the paper Forrester contributed to a 1998 symposium in honour of the late Lesslie Newbigin, which consciously assessed Newbigin’s contribution as a “public theologian”. He argues that Newbigin’s weakness as a public theologian is his failure to develop concrete applications for his powerful assertion of theology as public truth. but suggests that “in his strong ecclesiological emphasis, Newbigin lays down a foundation for public theology which is often rather neglected elsewhere”. “Lesslie Newbigin as Public Theologian” in Foust, Hunsberger, Kirk, Ustorf ed. 2002 pp3-12

John Smith... encouraged the remarkable resurrection of the Christian Socialist Movement, of which his successor Tony Blair is a leading member. Religious belief has returned in 'secular' Britain as a significant player in the public arena, to the bemusement of many intelligent observers.⁸⁹

However, if there was a renewed confidence in the prospects of the Left and about the prominence of religious belief in public life, this was married (awkwardly) with an increased concern about the secularisation of public discourse. Forrester's response here is revealed as highly conflicted, sympathetic on the one hand to the concerns of David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination* (1981) and Jeffrey Stout's *Ethics After Babel* (1988) for theological engagement with the public sphere and simultaneously doubting with Alasdair MacIntyre, Seyla Benhabib and Stanley Hauerwas both whether such a public sphere exists in the form Tracy has conceived of it and whether the church/theology can secure a hearing for its witness in the terms 'public discourse' is prepared to allow.⁹⁰

Forrester focuses on the meaning of justice within two particular debates about public policy, those concerned with criminal justice and with poverty⁹¹, arguing in each case that accounts of justice which excluded insights from Christian theology would be "narrow and thin".⁹² He proposed 'thickening' the conceptions of justice in public policy by "injecting theological fragments [such as the notions of 'generosity', 'forgiveness' and 'the just community']"⁹³ into public debate".⁹⁴ Within the witness of theology, he reserved a vital role for ecclesiology, for the church's role as (fragmentary) sign and anticipation of divine justice, and for eschatology, with the promise of justice at the end securing hope and acting as a check on idolatrous expectations of earthly politics.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 28

⁹⁰ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 32-36

⁹¹ See chapters 3 and 4 in Forrester 1997, CJPP

⁹² Forrester 1997, CJPP, 3

⁹³ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 244 [check this page reference in original]

⁹⁴ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 200

⁹⁵ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 244-251

Ultimately, the contribution of *Christian Justice and Public Policy* is marked by a profound methodological pessimism which leads Forrester to a ‘deflationary’ strategy, emphasising methodological reserve. This reflects, at least in part, his response to the influence of postmodernism on the academy in the 1990s. In the closing chapters of the book, he asserts that “social theology is in a good deal of methodological disarray at present” so that “attempts.. to produce some grand theology of justice seem doomed to failure”. Both middle axioms and grand narratives (of political liberation) “no longer seem to work”.⁹⁶ His methodologically ‘deflationary’ response is to insist with increased conviction on the Kierkegaardian language of *fragments*.⁹⁷

Forrester’s 2000 collection *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* included a number of pieces reflecting on method. The title echoes that of Vaclav Havel’s 1987 book, *Living In Truth*⁹⁸. The book was praised by prominent North American practical theologian Don Browning:

We have needed a clear and forceful model of practical theology that is simultaneously confessional, ecclesial and public – one that brings Barth and MacIntyre into the centre of the world practical theology discussion. Duncan Forrester’s new book answers this need.⁹⁹

In *Truthful Action*, Forrester compares ‘practical theology’ to “a teenager going through an identity crisis” and claimed that “tricky issues of methodology” were seldom faced.¹⁰⁰ He suggests that the old, clergy centred “skills directed”, “hints and tips” approach to practical theology “dies hard”.¹⁰¹ Correspondingly, “in a theological context, practical theology is often despised as no more than a bundle of pastoral outcomes of theological truth discovered elsewhere”.¹⁰² In its place, he proposes an understanding of ‘practical theology’ as “public theology

⁹⁶ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 198

⁹⁷ Forrester 1997, CJPP, pp 3, 84, 197, 200, 204, 244ff; Part IV of the book is headed “Theological fragments”.

⁹⁸ Vaclav Havel, *Living In Truth*, London Faber, 1987; Forrester holds Havel’s book in high esteem, it is the source of the ‘Greengrocer parable’ which he has retold in a number of essays including the first of this collection “What is Practice?” Forrester 2000, TA, 17-18

⁹⁹ quote on the dust jacket of Forrester 2000

¹⁰⁰ Forrester 2000, ix

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Forrester 2000, TA, 21

with a complex and daunting agenda”, aware that “this involves a considerable broadening of traditional notions of practical theology”.¹⁰³

An essay on “What is Practice?” offers the fourfold answer from the perspective of practical theology: it is God’s practice, human practice, church practice, ministerial practice.¹⁰⁴ The essay also contains a strong confessional and Christological emphasis: “we know the practice of the triune God” “through the communicative action of Jesus”¹⁰⁵ and “God’s truth can only be apprehended in the practice of discipleship”.¹⁰⁶

In his essay on “Public Practical Theology”, Hauerwas and Yoder are defended against the charge of sectarianism and the value of their contribution to public debate affirmed. Tracy’s ‘publics’ are apparently approved. Forrester promotes a *confessional* Public Theology, in which “theological contributions to public debate are, or ought to be, a way of confessing the faith, a part of the mission of the Church, a form of evangelism”.(113) Havel is summoned as a witness, then MacIntyre – the church’s witness to postmodernity is to a world in fragments, it must make do with a fragmentary theology, while still affirming this as public truth.(116) Amid the decay of public discourse and the renewed debate about the place of religion in society, Forrester suggests ‘there are two broad and different ways in which a public theology may be articulated: the *magisterial* (from above) and the *liberationist* (from below).’¹⁰⁷ Commenting on the ecumenical report on *Unemployment and the Future of Work*, he says it follows ‘the older tradition of Christian social ethos by taking social science and ‘the facts of the case’ particularly as presented by the economists, with a seriousness amounting to reverence’. However, he is critical of the theology in the report, which is eclipsed by the economics. This he says is reason to lament the state of British social theology: “it is sad that we seem to have made so little progress in social theology since *Faith In The City*” (125). His aim remains a

¹⁰³ *ibid.* x

¹⁰⁴ Forrester 2000, TA, 7

¹⁰⁵ Forrester 2000, TA, 7,8

¹⁰⁶ Forrester 2000, TA, 19

¹⁰⁷ Forrester 2000, 118

“liberation theology contextualised for Britain” (125). In the essay *Radical Reformed Orthodoxy: Can It Be Retrieved?* Forrester effectively takes the name of Radical Orthodoxy in vain, using it as a device to launch his own narrative of the radical strain in Scottish reformed theology. His gloss on “radical orthodoxy” fails to see “a serious, social, political and economic radicalism” flowing from its orthodox theology.¹⁰⁸ Forrester’s (mis)appropriation does, however lead to a provocative narrative of the social and political witness of the Reformed tradition in Scotland.

Forrester argues that the Scots reformers revised “two kingdoms” theology in significant ways. First in their understanding of the limits of the ‘spiritual’:

Theology and the gospel are not the concerns of the spiritual realm alone; they are the basis for a *confessional* politics and a *confessional* economics, based on an unashamedly christological foundation. The Scots Confession is thus in interesting ways comparable to the Barmen Declaration of 1934.(168)

Secondly, in Melville’s account of the church-state/monarch relation where there was “a strong affirmation of the sole Lordship of Christ and a powerful suggestion that this is mediated to the civil authorities by the Kirk” (169). Certainly, as Forrester says, this involved a claim to ‘spiritual independence’, the pursuit of which led to centuries of conflict. Forrester argues that the radicalism of Knox and Melville is continued in a different theological mode in the work of Rutherford in the 17th century. His narrative falters in the 18th century, but gathers momentum in his discussion of Chalmers in the early 19th. Chalmers emerges as a thoroughly accommodated and secularised thinker:

[Chalmers theology] ..embraced and endorsed almost without qualification the dominant contemporary economic and social theories. Its central problem was identified by Barth a century later: a free-floating natural theology has an in-built tendency to sanctify existing orders and assimilate to secular theories and philosophies. (177)

The period between the Wars is again portrayed as a sorry episode in the history of the Church of Scotland and the claims of the Articles Declaratory held up against the bigotry and racism of the church. Forrester identifies the 1937

¹⁰⁸ My understanding is that this is explicitly part of their project. Milbank has described *Theology and Social Theory* as written out of rage against Thatcherism.!

Oxford Conference as a corrective and hails the Baillie Commission, along with the Iona Community, as signs of a renewal of the tradition of reformed radicalism. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the liberal evangelicalism which characterised both Commission and Community is seen to give way to the social conservatism of the Scottish Barthians:

It is symptomatic that the key point on which T.F. Torrance differed from the master was infant baptism. In the 1950s, TFT headed a Church of Scotland Special Commission on Baptism which vigorously defended infant baptism and implied a conservative, Christendom-style ecclesiology in radical conflict with Barth's own assumption that Christendom was over and the West was once again a field of mission in which the baptism of infants no longer made acceptable sense.(180)

The 1960s saw biblical theology hit the rocks and witnessed “a kind of theological capitulation to the secular”. Today the Church of Scotland and its theological tradition are in crisis, there is a widespread failure of nerve. Forrester hails the 1989 Church and Nation report as a sign of the revival of the radical Reformed tradition. He thinks the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 with Burns and Psalm 100 both sounding out could mark the moment of opportunity for “retrieving and repossessing the Scottish tradition of radical orthodoxy”.

Writing on Liturgy & Worship

Duncan Forrester's inaugural lecture at New College in October 1978¹⁰⁹ set worship at the heart of practical theology emphasising its role in enabling social and political transformation and offering some sharply critical observations on the moribund condition of much Reformed worship and the need for reform through radical liturgical renewal and more frequent communion.

In 1983, two co-authored/edited works in this area appeared: *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* co-edited with Church Historian Douglas Murray (Forrester wrote Chapter 11 on “Worship Since 1929”), and *Encounter With God* co-edited with J.I.H. McDonald and G. Tellini. Both volumes were re-published in revised second editions in 1996. Forrester's chapter on worship from 1929,

¹⁰⁹ “Divinity in Use and Practice”, *SJT* 1980, 33 pp1-11

as well as charting the interests and influences of various branches of the liturgical movement and assessing the relative merits of a series of service books, offered some more ‘sociological’ reflections on the changed cultural context for preaching and the effects in the post war period of large movements of population combined with a programme of church extension on styles and patterns of worship.¹¹⁰ He also noted the important degree of convergence between Protestant and Roman Catholic worship in the post Vatican II era which meant that “more sharing in worship is now possible and desirable than has been conceivable since the Reformation”.¹¹¹

In 1989 he was involved in the production of *Worship Now Book 2* a second collection of liturgical items and ideas designed to supplement existing models and service books in use within the Church of Scotland.

In 1990, he contributed an essay on “Lex orandi, lex credendi” to the volume he edited on *Theology and Practice*. Here he affirms that worship, while it is “the centre without which all else falls apart” has no integrity apart from the practice of justice.¹¹² He criticises overly didactic sermon centred and sacramentally impoverished patterns of worship. Reflecting on the epigram of his title, he describes how doctrinal development in the early church often arose out of reflection on the practice of worship. The Pauline criticism of Corinthian practice at the Lord’s Supper is used as a model for exploring the radical ethical and political implications of the eucharist for contemporary life. He contrasts the (more Catholic) idea of devotion as a source for doctrine with the (more Protestant) insistence on doctrine as a check on devotion,¹¹³ opting for an ongoing dialectic between the two, while resisting a separation which would retain more ‘mythic’ expressions in worship, while rejecting them in theology.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Forrester & Murray ed. 1996, 181-183; This chapter contains one of a very few references to Ian Fraser in Forrester’s work, in connection with the Consultations on Hymn Writing and Church Music held at Dunblane in the 1960s, which Forrester notes as highly significant in encouraging a renaissance of hymn writing (offering the poetic gloss that “Ian Fraser turned Scottish Churches’ House into a nest of singing birds”..)

¹¹¹ Forrester & Murray ed. 1996, 191

¹¹² Forrester 1990, TPr 71

¹¹³ Forrester 1990, TPr 76-77

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 79

In his 1994 SJT article on the survival of liberation theology after 1989, Forrester distanced himself from Alastair Kee's call for liberation theology to press on with a further critique of the 'mythological' aspects of popular worship practice.¹¹⁵ At this time, Forrester became involved in the WCC Study Programme on Ecclesiology and Ethics, attending two major consultations at Jerusalem in 1994 and Johannesburg in 1996.¹¹⁶ This involvement was reflected in a number of publications. In a 1996 essay, "Transforming Worship", he defended the closing paragraphs of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (which emphasise the need for communities of resistance to the prevailing culture) against the (sectarian) criticisms of Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout, arguing that such communities "have been pushed" rather than withdrawing voluntarily from the public realm. Worship in such expectant communities of faith is anomalous, 'liminal' ritual practice, the Lord's song in a strange land, anticipating the future, reappropriating the tradition and disturbing the present.¹¹⁷

In a 1997 article on "Moral Formation and Liturgy"¹¹⁸ he challenged the "strong move" in secular societies "to treat moral formation as having little if anything to do with religious practice" as part of the privatization of religion, arguing that baptism and eucharist were crucial dimensions of Christian moral formation.¹¹⁹ The essay "Liberating Worship" (2000) endorsed Hauerwas' description of baptism and the Lord's Supper as "the essential rituals of our politics" and used examples from James Cone and Forrester's own experience in India to argue for connections between the practice of worship and struggles for human liberation from poverty and oppression.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Forrester 1994, SJT 47

¹¹⁶ Forrester 1997; the reports of the WCC Consultation, alongwith a further reflection by Duncan Forrester can be found in *Ecclesiology and Ethics – Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* Thomas F. Best & Martin Robra eds. Geneva, WCC, 1997

¹¹⁷ McEnhill & Hall ed. 1996, 14

¹¹⁸ "Moral Formation and Liturgy" in *The Ecumenical Review* 49/3 1997 pp379-383; This was a response to Vigen Guroian's article "Moral Formation and Christian Worship" in the same volume: *The Ecumenical Review* 49/3, 1997, pp372-8

¹¹⁹ *ibid.* 381-383

¹²⁰ Forrester 2000, TA, 91ff

Writing on Ecclesiology

Forrester's inaugural lecture in 1978 affirmed the need to pursue practical theology within a vision of the church as ecumenical and worldwide.¹²¹ In a 1979 chapter on "The Ecumenical Renovation of the Gospel" Forrester celebrated the global ecumenical movement as enabling a "new, open and equal dialogue between Christians in many lands".¹²² *Christianity and the Future of Welfare* (1985) contained an important chapter on "The Public Role of the Church Today". In 1986, Forrester's contribution to *The Scottish Churches and the Political Process Today* emphasised the role of the churches as the guardians of "mystique" – vision, motivation and community for those involved in "politique". *Just Sharing* (1988) as well as being a church report, contained detailed recommendations for the practice of the church in relation to issues of wealth and distribution as well as for government policy. In 1993, he contributed a chapter on "The Place of the Church in the New Europe"

By 1995, he was involved with the WCC study project on 'Ecclesiology and Ethics' and produced an article "Ecclesiology and Ethics: A Reformed View" for the *Ecumenical Review*.¹²³ A further important reflection on the WCC themes came in his short 1997 book *The True Church and Morality*.¹²⁴

His first explicit published theological reflections on the status of the Church of Scotland came in 1999 in his article "*Ecclesia Scotiana*: established, free or national?".¹²⁵ The essay collection *Truthful Action* (2000) included a number of essays on ecclesial themes: "Transforming Ministry", "Power and Pastoral Care", "The Public Church Reborn", "Ecumenical Practice: Reflections on Ecclesiology and Ethics" and "The Practice of Mission: An Indian Case Study".¹²⁶

¹²¹ SJT 1980 Vol 33 p7

¹²² Wilmer ed. 1979, 39

¹²³ *The Ecumenical Review*, 47 (2) (1995) 217-224

¹²⁴ Beyond the time-frame of this chapter, he contributed the entry on 'Ecclesiology and Ethics' in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement 2nd Ed.* (Geneva, WCC, 2003)

¹²⁵ *Theology* CII, No 806 – March/April 1999

¹²⁶ Forrester 2000, TA, Chapters 5, 6, 9, 12 and 13

Summary

This survey of Forrester's published work up to the year 2000 has occupied more space than similar sections in the previous two chapters, reflecting the fact the Forrester has published a great deal more than either Baillie or Fraser. The role of dissemination and publication in his work stands in a direct contrast with that of Ian Fraser, so that these are key *practices* within Forrester's practice as a whole. A further crucial area of practice is the operation of CTPI.

The Programme and Method of CTPI 1984-2000

Aims and Ethos

In the 2003 collection, *God in Society – Doing Social Theology in Scotland Today*¹²⁷ Duncan Forrester's essay on "The Political Service of Theology in Scotland"¹²⁸ reflects on the history of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues which he was instrumental in establishing in 1984 and which he directed from 1984 to 2000.

The Centre for Theology and Public Issues in the University of Edinburgh was initially established to attempt to meet a widely expressed need for a serious Christian think-tank in Scotland on social, constitutional and political issues which could act as a resource for the churches and for others in contributing to public debate. It should be ecumenical and seek academic rigour in all its work. It was to engage with specific issues, where people are hurting, where there is much uncertainty and often where serious communication among those of differing commitments, experiences and views has more or less broken down. The Centre was to try to predict and engage with the issues that would be on the public agenda tomorrow, or next year, rather than with the issues that everyone was talking about and studying at the present moment. This forward look was to ensure that we did not simply repeat what everyone was saying anyway, or duplicate research that was going on elsewhere. Instead we were to try to equip the churches and theologians to prepare seriously for tomorrow's debates.¹²⁹

Even in retrospect, perhaps especially so, Forrester's emphasis on the close ties between the Centre and "the churches" is notable, as is the relative lack of emphasis on exactly how the Centre fitted within an increasingly secular, research driven university. Forrester suggests that initially the Centre was offered

¹²⁷ Storrar & Donald ed. 2003 – This collection of essays was in honour of Andrew Morton, Associate Director of CTPI from 1994 to 2001.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* Ch 4 pp83ff

¹²⁹ Storrar ed. 2003, 100

support by the Faculty of Divinity and the University on something of a goodwill basis.¹³⁰ Certainly, aside from the help with overheads which came from the use of university space, there was no substantial funding commitment from the university side, so that from the beginning CTPI had to pay its own way. It was allowed to go ahead under the university banner as an experiment, which then began to commend itself to the institution by the 'quality' and prestige of the speakers it was able to attract.¹³¹ The early success of CTPI's work and its consolidation as a university centre is a tribute to Forrester's skills as a networker and his ability to put together a programme which was seen to bring credit to the university as an institution. His uncompromisingly ecclesial vision of theology was combined with a commitment to interdisciplinarity¹³² and (in this respect, very like Ian Fraser) an ability to go 'bald-headed' for 'the people who matter' and very often, to get them to come to CTPI. Will Storrar has also suggested that in the political climate of the 1980s, when many in the universities perceived the government to be hostile to a more liberal social agenda in higher education, the ethos of CTPI in its willingness to rally critical thinkers and engage the agenda of the New Right resonated with powerful forces in the university establishment.¹³³ CTPI in the 1980s was clearly associated with the political agenda of the Christian Left in Scotland and the wider UK.

It seems, therefore, that CTPI established its credentials with the university, both in terms of old-fashioned elitism – the ability to attract 'top' people, experts and opinion formers to its events, thus working to reinforce the university's status in public life – and in terms of its political orientation, in which connection its theological identity may also have been a convenient 'cover' for political opposition to the government within a public body.

¹³⁰ Interview One with Duncan Forrester

¹³¹ Interview One with Duncan Forrester.

¹³² "CTPI was intended to be and from the beginning was in fact, a thoroughly interdisciplinary operation, involving people from many different specialities and various kinds of experience in its work. It had and has, a special care for the place of theology." Storrar ed. 2003, 100

¹³³ Private communication, quoted by permission.

The focus on attracting the people who matter, while perhaps essential to the Centre's survival, existed in some tension with Forrester's firm commitment to the methods of liberation theology and a commitment to do theology alongside the poor. In this respect, it may be said the CTPI probably did more than most if not all other comparable parts of the university to involve representatives of poorer communities in its conferences. In his retrospective essay, Forrester argued that:

In social theology, there is a need to put scientific study of the situation at the service of a more affective or emotional approach which enables us to see things through others' eyes..¹³⁴

It is I believe, bad in principle and bad in practice to talk about people behind their backs, particularly is they are relatively powerless people who are often labelled 'problems' and one is talking about their problems and how to solve them.

We had in the work of CTPI from very early on a determination not to speak about people and their problems behind their backs.. So when we are discussing poverty, we have poor people as participants; when we are talking about homelessness, there are homeless people present.¹³⁵

However, analysis of the speakers list shows that, for the most part, it was very often the great and the good, more often than not the Labour-supporting wing of the senior common room, who were to the fore in CTPI conferences.

In terms of gender balance, CTPI's record is extremely disappointing. Based on a provisional analysis of lists of speakers¹³⁶ at CTPI conferences between 1984 and 1999, there were 182 men and 25 women. In percentage terms, this means that around 85% of the keynote speakers and panellists at CTPI events were male. For an institution which had as one of its key aims, a concern to do theology alongside those who were systematically disadvantaged in Scottish society, this is not a strong record.

Analysis of named participants in terms of social class would yield an even smaller total of participants who could be described as poor or even working

¹³⁴ Storrar ed. 2003 99

¹³⁵ Storrar ed. 2003, 101

¹³⁶ Each speaker at each conference was counted once, so some individuals (both male and female) figure more than once in the total. Gender was either known or deduced from names.

class. This is not meant to rubbish Forrester's claims so much as to put them in perspective. CTPI seminars were not "the Gospels in Solentiname"¹³⁷. They were on the whole, elite academic gatherings with a slightly more developed social conscience about attendance than most comparable secular events.

Whose Public? Which Issues?

An analysis of the subjects of CTPI publications in our period shows where interest and activity was concentrated¹³⁸:

General	Numbers of Occasional Papers/Discussion Papers/ Book Titles	Number of Publications
Social Welfare	OP 3; OP 7; OP 8; OP 30; OP 37; OP 41	6
Social Vision	OPO 17; (OP 20); OP 23; OP 32; OP 34; DP 2; DP 5	6
Political Theory	OP 5; OP 16;	2
Economics/Finance	OP 11; OP 14; OP 15; OP 21; OP 35; Book/CMI	6
Law & Order	OP 10; OP 18; OP 27; OP 38; Book/EP;	5
Health & Disability	OP 1; OP 4; OP 6; OP 13; OP 19; OP 29; DP 3;	7
Education	OP 2; OP 9; DP 1;	3
Media	OP 24; DP 4; Book/DI; Book OLRB; Book VA	5
International Relations	OP 22; OP 25; OP 33; OP 36; OP 40; OP 44	5
Northern Ireland	OP 12; OP 43	1.5
Scotland	OP 20; OP 28; OP 31; OP 39; Book/SCPP; OP 43	5.5
Animal Welfare	OP 26;	1
Family Policy/ Sexual Ethics	OP 42;	1
TOTAL		54

The categories are roughly drawn, but even so, certain conclusions emerge clearly:

¹³⁷ The title of Liberation theologian Ernesto Cardenal's famous report on bible-studies in poor communities in Latin America

¹³⁸ While not every publication was associated with an event and vice versa; most CTPI events led to an associated publication, so the analysis of publications is a fair guide to the analysis of events.

- CTPI's reading of public issues was closely aligned with that of mainstream party politics – questions of economics, law & order, health & welfare predominate in the list of subjects.
- A distinctive feature of CTPI's agenda was its stress on what was called "social vision". Its agenda was therefore more future orientated than mainstream politics tended to be.
- Issues relating to women's experience, gender discrimination, violence against women, childcare, representation in public life etc. hardly figure.
- Issues around ethnicity, racism, cultural and religious pluralism are given very little attention.
- Questions of family life are well covered from a social welfare perspective, but only the 1993 Occasional Paper on *AIDS, Sex and the Scottish Churches* addresses issues of sexual morality or relationship ethics. There is no dedicated consideration of issues relating to marriage, divorce, living together, homosexuality, teenage pregnancy or abortion.
- Even given the arrival of the Theology and Media Project, there is relatively little attention paid to 'popular culture' with whole sectors – pop music, film, sport etc. not treated.
- Apart from television, the Arts do not seem to be recognised as being or raising public issues.
- The environment and 'green' issues are given very little attention, as are rural issues generally.

In the light of these conclusions, and given the fact that the period under consideration covers over a decade and a half of programming, it is clear that there were definite biases and preferences at work in terms of the way "public issues" were defined and in the light of our survey of Forrester's own work, it is clear that there is a close fit between the areas which received most and least attention in his own work and in the work of CTPI.

Funding and Personnel

The centre was established in 1984 with no independent budget, but with the promise of some secretarial time and help from members of the founding Committee and the staff of the Christian Ethics Department¹³⁹ - small grants were received from a number of trusts. The Annual Report for 1985/86 reports a “vigorous and active second year” and that the Centre was now regarded as “firmly established”. Grants from the Binks and Christendom Trusts had enabled part-time secretarial and research assistance to be taken on.

Rev. George Wilkie became Associate Director of CTPI in May 1988. The May 1988 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland resolved to give an annual grant of £1,500 to the centre for five years and contributions were also being received from the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Scottish Congregational Union. Subsequently, the Binks Trust has remained an important subsistence funder for the Centre as it struggled to adjust to a funding culture in the 1990s in which its operating capacity was increasingly linked to the success of research bids. Unable to access university income directly, since graduate students were not directly enrolled through the Centre, it also proved unable to create a substantial endowment which would have secured its future along more ‘North American’ lines.

Andrew Morton was appointed as Associate Director in 1994 and served in this capacity until 2001, when he retired to be replaced by Alison Eliot. Will Storrar served as Director of the Centre between 2000 and 2004.

CTPI Working Groups

In 1985-6, a decision was taken to establish a number of working parties to focus on “topic areas where there is rather little theological work being done in Scotland and it is felt that the Centre may make a distinctive and useful contribution”. The remit of the groups was “to monitor developments and proposals in its area, to familiarise itself with research and publications and to engage in theological reflection and writing on issues arising in its specific field”.

¹³⁹ CTPI Annual Report 1984/5, CTPI Archives, CTPI

Members were expected to commit themselves to reading and preparation of papers alongwith at least one residential meeting each year and a number of shorter meetings. They were also tasked with “stimulating interest among younger church people” and “encouraging the development of specialised expertise”.¹⁴⁰

Working Groups were subsequently established on Education; Social Welfare; Finance and Ethics and Penal Policy. The Penal Policy Group met regularly over a period of two and a half years, held residential meetings, consulted with a wide variety of people, visited prisons and held two consultations prior to the publication of its report in the form of Chris Wood's book, *The End of Punishment*.¹⁴¹

Forrester reflects on the 1985 CTPI Day Conference ‘Law and Order – Prospects for the Future’ and on the experience of the interdisciplinary working group subsequently set up by CTPI in chapter 3 of his 1997 volume, *Christian Justice and Public Policy*.¹⁴² He notes here that over time “our group divided into those who thought theory to be a distraction... and those who saw theory .. as something which *when properly used* ‘enables us to think with a clarity and breadth of perspective unavailable to the hard-pressed practitioner’”.¹⁴³

After the January 1989 Conference on the Renewal of Social Vision, a Working Party was established on Christian Resources for the Renewal of Social Vision.¹⁴⁴ and a working group on Finance and Ethics was also established in this year. The 1989/90 Annual Report notes that the Penal Policy and Education Working Groups were near to completing their work. It also reports the Centre's involvement in the Strathclyde Inter-Church AIDS Project. The 1990/91 report notes that the Finance and Ethics working group had made a submission to the

¹⁴⁰ CTPI Annual Report 1985/6, CTPI Archives, CTPI

¹⁴¹ Forrester 1997, CJPP, pp65-66

¹⁴² op cit Forrester 1997, pp63ff

¹⁴³ internal quote from David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study In Social Theory*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1990, p277

¹⁴⁴ CTPI Annual Report 1988.9, CTPI Archives CTPI

Independent Enquiry into Corporate Take-Overs in the UK, undertaken for the Rowntree Trust, which was printed in one of the Groups initial papers.

Assessing the Contribution of CTPI

In his editorial essay on Duncan Forrester as ‘Public Theologian’, the associate director of CTPI Andrew Morton makes the important point that while some of Forrester’s public theology “is publishable and has been published, some of it is not publishable, being hidden in the lives of those who have participated in the Forrester-inspired enterprise”.¹⁴⁵ This is a point already made in the previous chapter about the work of Ian Fraser at SCH – that there is a hidden aspect to the legacy of SCH consultations and CTPI conferences – the ongoing influence they have on those who have participated in them; influence which cannot easily be measured, but must be credited. But alongside the hidden aspects of CTPI’s work, there is a highly visible international reputation within Practical Theology in particular and Theology in general. CTPI is known and respected, particularly within English-speaking, Western theological circles, as a pioneer in its field. Its inter-disciplinary emphasis has been an important model for other centres and institutions. Much of this reputation in the period in question was linked to the role and reputation of Duncan Forrester as the Centre’s Director. In their introduction to the 2004 Festschrift for Duncan Forrester, Will Storrar and Andrew Morton characterise “his special roles in the work of the Centre” as:

..to discern and formulate the crucial issues deserving treatment; to design and refine the method of their treatment; to distil from this essentially interdisciplinary enterprise the uniquely theological insights.¹⁴⁶

Duncan Forrester’s own 2003 assessment of the achievement of CTPI (its “political service”¹⁴⁷) was attentive to strengths and weaknesses in its record:

Occasionally we succeeded in CTPI in offering theological insights that were regarded as strikingly relevant; but sometimes the theology didn’t connect. Increasingly we discovered that people became involved in our work because we provided a highly

¹⁴⁵ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 36

¹⁴⁶ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 4

¹⁴⁷ This was the title of his retrospective essay in Storrar & Morton ed. 2003

unusual kind of forum and they were anxious, even if they had no Christian commitment, to hear whether theology had anything relevant and interesting to say.¹⁴⁸

CTPI's published/disseminated output, mostly in the form of modestly bound internally published "Occasional Papers", of which there were 44 published between 1984 and 2000 on a wide range of subjects, represents an important body of interdisciplinary work on social theology in this era. On the positive side, within the research driven world of contemporary academic theology, with its focus on 'big books' and scholarly journals, its highly contextual nature offers an important 'third stream' of theological dissemination. In a small country like Scotland, it has offered a crucial vehicle for more localised theological reflection, which would often not be seen as commercially viable by mainstream publishers.¹⁴⁹ On the debit side, although unlike SCH, occasional papers were published, the production values were poor and circulation was very small. The drive to make CTPI more accessible meant that conferences were not as attuned to the publishing market as "straight academic conferences" and the failure to secure an adequate long term funding arrangement for CTPI meant that editing, typesetting and printing were done on a shoe string and the publications were mostly self distributed by the centre. The effect of this was to lower the status and impact of the publications within the academic world and to render them virtually invisible in the 'public' marketplace. There were clear signs that this approach was changing under Will Storrar's directorship in the past several years as new publications began to appear.

Tensions and uncertainties remain however, in relation to what and who CTPI was for. Given Forrester's abiding commitment to the methods of liberation theology, it is legitimate to ask how far a university based think-tank could hope to be the vanguard for a Scottish contextualisation of liberation theology which was worked out in close accountability with the churches and the poor. And

¹⁴⁸ Storrar ed. 2003, 100

¹⁴⁹ There were 7 CTPI publications which dealt specifically with Scottish issues in this period: *The Scottish Churches and the Political Process Today* ed. Forrester & Eliot, CTPI, 1986; *Christianity and Social Vision – Looking to the Future of Scotland*, CTPI Occasional Paper 20; *Seeing Scotland, Seeing Christ*, CTPI Occasional Paper 28; *Aids, Sex and the Scottish Churches*, CTPI Occasional Paper 29; *God's Will in a Time of Crisis*, CTPI Occasional Paper 31; *Catholicism and the Future of Scotland*, CTPI Occasional Paper 39; *A Turning Point in Ireland and Scotland*, CTPI Occasional Paper 43.

who was to be influenced who would take this forward? In *Theology and Politics* (1988) Forrester was dubious about the middle class experiments in Base Community in the UK and had little enthusiasm for the ‘sectarian fundamentalist churches which sometimes thrive as churches of the poor’. That left, on the ecclesial side, the mainstream churches in the UPA’s – who at least were still *there* and also, more broadly, an intelligentsia of academics, civil society activists and campaigners, media figures and business leaders as well as civil servants and politicians. These were CTPI’s real constituencies and, while concrete outcomes of its influence on UK/Scottish church and society are hard to identify, it appears to have been valued as an interdisciplinary ‘thinking-space’ by those within its orbit. In retrospect, however, CTPI can be seen to have carried troubling questions about the *location* of theology within Scottish society as part of its own methodological dilemmas. The radical trajectory of Forrester’s thought in the 1980s and the dominant influence of Liberation Theology – were leading him to advocate a transformation in theological method (and by implication in sociological method) which was in strong tension with his own location in a Scottish divinity faculty. CTPI is a sign both of the fruitfulness and frustration of that tension: at its best, CTPI could claim to be a kind of prophetic presence within both the university and the church; at its worst, it was simply reproducing the problem and struggling to integrate or prioritise its various identities as university centre, resource for churches and policy think tank.

The World in Forrester's Theology

The World as Fallen

Significantly, Duncan Forrester spent the 1960s, not in Europe celebrating the new horizons of 'secular theology' but in India confronting the struggles of a young democracy facing overwhelming issues of poverty within a society divided by class, caste and religion. For a theologian well schooled in Barth's strictures against liberal optimism, a decade in India confirmed some of the most basic insights of Reformed theology. Writing in 2003, he offered what is a relatively rare reflection within his own work on the theology of creation and fall:

The critique of natural law developed by Barth and discerned by him as already there in the early documents of the Scottish Reformation apparently retains its saliency. Nature as we observe and experience it, is according to Reformed theology fallen, a broken remnant of God's original order and final purpose. God's purpose, being and commands cannot now be read off nature as we find it.¹⁵⁰

Forrester has never embraced with any enthusiasm those 1960s theologies which hailed the progress of secularization as the work of God in history. In *Theology and Politics* (1988) he argues that:

The secular theologies of the 1960s...ended with a Eusebian sanctification of the secular, and a celebration of the secular city which amounted in the political sphere at least to little more than reflection and endorsement of the superficial optimism of the day...Such theologies were quite incapable of taking the measure of the secular human being who exploits his neighbour and destroys his environment. They could not understand that the secularization which was experienced as emancipation by some was simultaneously felt as oppression by others, who saw theologies of the secular as justifications of oppression.¹⁵¹

Here too we see his conviction that such theologies fail to reckon with the disordered character of creation and the reality of evil within human societies. It is a theological judgment which is also deployed in relation to the work of Jürgen Habermas in his 1997 *Christian Justice and Public Policy*:

A theologian might echo Anselm in suggesting that he [Habermas] has not yet considered the gravity of sin and its pervasive distortion of human judgments.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Storrar & Donald ed. 2003, 93-4

¹⁵¹ Forrester 1988, TP, 41

¹⁵² Forrester 1997, CJPP, 173

While he repeatedly praises Reinhold Niebuhr's application of insights from such areas of Christian doctrine, Forrester himself has written surprisingly little reflecting directly on the doctrine of creation/fall or on theological anthropology. His own consideration of 'the gravity of sin' has instead paid considerable attention to theological discussions of the New Testament references to "principalities and powers".

The World and the Powers

In tracing the emergence of this theme in twentieth century theology, we see again the importance of Karl Barth's theology for Forrester. In contrast to liberal schools of theology and biblical scholarship in the 19th and early 20th centuries which had been reserved and even dismissive about such apocalyptic and 'mythological' language, Forrester observes that Barth and his circle recovered this theological emphasis when confronted by the rise of Nazism in 1930s Germany.¹⁵³ The seminal work done by Oscar Cullmann in the 1950s was taken further from the 1970s in the work of Walter Wink and his trilogy of studies on 'naming', 'confronting' and 'unmasking' the powers.¹⁵⁴ Wink's work is important for Forrester because his analysis of the powers is developed in relation to economic, social and political analysis and in dialogue with theologies of liberation.¹⁵⁵

Forrester maintains that for Barth and his colleagues, the New Testament material on the powers "gave vital clues for a proper understanding of the political realm and church's responsibilities towards it". On this basis they asserted that "the state belongs to Jesus Christ" and is bound to serve him in a commission it cannot escape and will one day have to fulfil completely. "By renouncing its true origin and destiny the state may become demonic". The political order, in this view, Forrester concludes, "is charged with profound spiritual significance".¹⁵⁶ He supports Walter Wink's contention that Christians

¹⁵³ Forrester 1989, BVP, pp69ff

¹⁵⁴ Walter Wink: *Unmasking the Powers*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1986

¹⁵⁵ Forrester 1989, BVP, pp69ff

are called, in their 'reading' of the world to "unmask the powers", giving as an example the need to 'unmask' the workings of the international monetary system in relation to Third World Debt.¹⁵⁷

In his appreciation for the work of Walter Wink, we see a clear example of the key role played in Forrester's theology by his commitment to holding together two distinctive ways of reading the world. First, there is a Reformed and more specifically, Barthian *and* Niebuhrian vision of the world which is highly sensitive to the capacity for self-deception about human capacities found within liberal optimism. In expounding this *theological* reading of the world, Forrester displays his commitment to the indispensable role of directly theological and biblical language about 'idolatry', 'the demonic' and 'the powers'. His view of the world insists on a continuing role for apocalyptic and on the crucial role played by eschatology. The world in which we live today cannot be rightly understood or acted in without an awareness of 'the world to come'.

In the closing chapter of *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, Forrester insists on the continuing importance of understanding the world in terms of the need for "transcendence". There are many things people look for which politics cannot deliver for them; "politics on its own cannot provide the kind of ultimate meaning which people long for and for which there is a fundamental human need". If it tries to, it will turn the market or the state into idols invested with an "alien numinosity". The language of transcendence is necessary to bear theological witness against the idolatrous pretensions of the state/market, but also to resist the reduction of the gospel to a political programme.¹⁵⁸

However, if this kind of theology of the powers insists on the 'spiritualisation of politics' it also demands 'the politicisation of spirituality'. The second major way of reading the world in Forrester's work is through the analytical tools offered by

¹⁵⁶ Forrester 1989, BVP, 72

¹⁵⁷ The third of Walter Wink's trilogy of books on the powers is called *Unmasking the Powers*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1986

¹⁵⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, 82-83

the social sciences. This has been a constant theme from his earliest writings down to the essay published in 2000, in “Practical theology and Christian Ethics” in which he restates his position that “practical theology today must have the social sciences as its principal dialogue partners”.¹⁵⁹ What the social sciences do in Forrester’s work is to ‘thicken’ and ‘particularise’ theological understandings of disorder and social conflict in the world, but they are also called upon to play a key role in transformation as well as in analysis, as concrete strategies and policies for transformation emerge from the dialogue between theology and social/political science. The social sciences are for Forrester an indispensable means of describing and understanding the world as the arena of class struggle, the world as a location dominated by the powerful who use their power to maintain oppressive social and economic conditions for the poor, as the specific places where people are oppressed and excluded on the basis of caste¹⁶⁰ or ethnicity¹⁶¹. He is drawn to and influenced by the uses of social science in liberation theology, because these neo-Marxist appropriations move beyond ‘understanding’ to address the project of ‘changing’ the world.

To borrow terminology from Graham Ward’s work on Barth and Derrida¹⁶², in Forrester’s work, the social sciences function as a methodological supplement (and corrective) to theology, while theology functions as a philosophical [or theoretical?] supplement (and corrective) to the social sciences. This position, which Forrester has maintained consistently throughout his mature work, has allowed him to always advocate a ‘theoretical reserve’ in relation to particular ideological incarnations of the social sciences, both Weberian and Marxist. But they remain essential dialogue partners and essential change-making partners in the programme of ‘world transforming political praxis’ which Forrester advocated in his original 1978 lecture.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Forrester 2000, TA, 54

¹⁶⁰ Forrester’s Indian experience and PhD on *Caste and Christianity*

¹⁶¹ The 1985 *Kairos Declaration* from South African theologians had a powerful impact on Forrester’s thinking and alongwith the Barmen declaration has become one of the most frequently quoted examples of the prophetic public church in his work.

¹⁶² Ward 1995, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

¹⁶³ Forrester 1980, SJT, 5

Forrester's insistence on a 'science' of society (which is other than theology) reflects his clear commitment to a realist understanding of the world. This strongly realist (and as we have argued above 'empiricist') orientation leads predictably to a strong resistance to 'the post-modernist challenge' as a *reductio ad absurdum* of enlightenment liberalism.¹⁶⁴ It is however, a realism which struggles to be explicit about its own philosophical and methodological status; and for that, Alasdair MacIntyre is at least partly 'to blame'.¹⁶⁵

The World After Virtue

A third major dimension of Forrester's reading of the world, alongside the theological and social-scientific, is the philosophical. From the early 1980s Forrester increasingly read the world in terms learned from Alasdair MacIntyre. Despite expressing regular reservations about the strength of MacIntyre's critique, the world described by Forrester was a world 'after virtue' in the sense that he found MacIntyre's analysis of ethical disintegration and incommensurability compelling.¹⁶⁶ He was also sympathetic to the work of Lesslie Newbigin¹⁶⁷ and identified with his critique, as one returning from India to the UK, of the corrosive effects of Enlightenment rationalism on the culture of the west.¹⁶⁸

Forrester, however, has a problem with his reception of MacIntyre, which we alluded to earlier. At its simplest, I would characterise it as the fear that MacIntyre's philosophical position, while Forrester wants it, needs it even, to 'rebuke' the pretensions of the Enlightenment and shed light on the bewildering ethical pluralism of contemporary life, will ultimately have a depoliticising effect which he finds impossible to accept. He is both drawn to MacIntyre's philosophical critique and deeply uneasy about its political implications. There is a sense in which Forrester is 'haunted' by MacIntyre, which is rendered more

¹⁶⁴ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 186ff

¹⁶⁵ cf. Forrester's quote from Lewis Mudge in Forrester 1998, CJPP, 35 on "the faith tradition as the criterion of reality" in a world of relativism.

¹⁶⁶ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 197; Forrester 1988 TP, 144-149

¹⁶⁷ Also informed by MacIntyre's work – see eg *The Gospel In a Pluralist Society*

¹⁶⁸ Lesslie Newbigin returns to Britain after a lifetime of work abroad as an ecumenical statesman and finds Britain a profoundly pagan country and British Christianity 'in an advanced case of syncretism'. It can no longer distinguish the gospel message from the culture of our day, which is uncritically 'absorbed without posing a radical challenge'. Forrester 1989, BVP, 46

acute by MacIntyre's own tangled history of engagement and disengagement with Marxism. Forrester's discomfort, which consists of his refusal to abandon the liberal/liberationist project of the Enlightenment while simultaneously questioning its philosophical credentials, has led him (in a move which reflects the influence of Jeffrey Stout's 1988 *Ethics After Babel*)¹⁶⁹ to embrace the Kierkegaardian language of 'fragments' as an antidote to MacIntyre's overly "apocalyptic" diagnosis. The end result is Forrester's attempt to stabilise a 'holding position' in his philosophical reading of the world, which can accept a moderate version of MacIntyre's critique of liberalism, while still seeking to salvage what remains of the emancipatory political project of modernity and repair it with 'fragments' of theological truth.¹⁷⁰

The World As Public

A further problematic area in Forrester's work concerns his reading of the world in terms of 'public' and 'private'. Much of the time, particularly in his earlier writings, Forrester appears to work on a 'common-sense' basis in his references to the 'public' realm and 'public' issues.¹⁷¹ Even after *After Virtue*, with its critique of the enlightenment bifurcation between 'public' facts and 'private' values, Forrester's main strategy is to resist the relegation of theology to the private realm and to insist on its proper claim to be regarded as 'public truth'.¹⁷²

Forrester is initially attracted by David Tracy's 1981 multiplication of 'publics' in *The Analogical Imagination* and is still apparently defending it in his essay on "Public Practical Theology" published in 2000. However, his willingness to

¹⁶⁹ cf Forrester 1997, CJPP, 31; c.f. also Fergusson 2004 "Jeffrey Stout finds [MacIntyre's diagnosis unduly pessimistic. We can survive on moral fragments through bricolage.. we have sufficient in common to provide the cohesion that will offset the process of fragmentation."

¹⁷⁰ "The time is probably past.. when a 'Christian map of reality' can be constructed. But it is still possible for the theologian to attempt what Reinhold Niebuhr did so successfully – to produce from the Christian theological tradition critical insights about human nature and human society which challenge and enrich thought about social relations and social behaviour." Forrester 1988, TP, 157 – the 'map of reality' phrase is attributed to William Temple. This strategy has important ecclesiological repercussions which are explored in the next section.

¹⁷¹ "There must be a constant recognition of the interdependence and interpenetration of the public and private spheres. They depend on one another and either is impoverished if the other is neglected." Forrester 1988, TP, 56

¹⁷² e.g. "A political theology must stay resolutely in the public realm and engage with the ideologies, structures and practices which are to be found there." Forrester 1988, TP, 55

reproduce Tracy's language in this later essay sits awkwardly with the more critical perspective previously outlined in 1997's *Christian Justice and Public Policy*. There he had begun to engage more fully with the problematic of how the term 'public' is to be engaged, citing objections to Tracy's understanding of publicity.¹⁷³ These were further developed later in the same work in his discussion of Habermas's notion of the "public sphere" and his endorsement of Seyla Benhabib and Susan Moller Okin's criticisms of Habermas' criteria for publicity as reflecting patriarchal values.¹⁷⁴

The World As Social

While Forrester devotes little time or space to a detailed explanation of his anthropology, the claim that "human beings can only be properly understood as persons-in-relation"¹⁷⁵ displays the social personalist assumptions which lie at its heart. In this he is heir to the line of Buber-Barth-Baillie-MacMurray influence on Scottish theology and as such, primed to contest Thatcherite denials of society.

The World As Patriarchal

It is fair to say that until a 1997 chapter on "Communication, Gender and Justice"¹⁷⁶ there is little sign in Forrester of an attempt to read the disorder of the world in terms of patriarchy, or indeed of any significant reception of feminist theory or theology. After 1997, his next major book *On Human Worth* (2001) contains noticeably more references to female scholars and thinkers alongwith explicit theological and biblical reflections on the equality of women and men. It is an emphasis which has been late in emerging in his work and it would be hard not to say, too late.

¹⁷³ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 32-33

¹⁷⁴ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 166ff

¹⁷⁵ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 141

¹⁷⁶ Forrester 1997, CJPP, Chapter 7

The World as God's

One of Forrester's clearest statements of the world as 'graced', as the sphere of God's 'practice' and action comes in a late essay "What is Practice?" published in 2000. Here, in a less often heard 'systematic' voice, he reflects that:

The Trinity is ... a model of action-in-fellowship, whose activity is not limited to the Church or to believers... We must have an adequately broad understanding of God's continuing activity in the world, as broad as that of the prophets and the apostles. God's action concerns not just individuals but nations and peoples and structures, both the claims of the neighbour and the challenges of the 'principalities and powers' and the 'elemental spirits of the universe' which are to be brought into subjection to Christ.¹⁷⁷

The belief that 'the earth is the Lord's' means that Forrester in the 1980s was prepared to echo Tawney's judgment from the 1920s that a gospel of economic success "represented a modern paganism".¹⁷⁸ It means too, that the process of secularization is read as loss more than as gain, witness his citation of the analyses of Michael Ignatieff and Jeremy Seabrook in support of his claim that "Something vital has been lost in the process of secularization, something that impedes our flourishing and our true sociability or conviviality, to say nothing of our salvation".¹⁷⁹

Scotland As World

Aside from 1988's *Just Sharing*, which was the report of Working Group commissioned by the Church of Scotland, Duncan Forrester has written surprisingly little which is directly about Scotland and Scottish society. In 1989, he wrote that "Scotland is much less of a Christian country than it used to be"¹⁸⁰ and a decade later, in an article about Scotland he wrote of "the pervasive and profound secularization that has taken place since the 1960s"¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁷ Forrester 2000, TA, 9

¹⁷⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP 47

¹⁷⁹ Forrester 1989, BVP 48

¹⁸⁰ Forrester 1989, BVP, 59

¹⁸¹ Forrester 1999, *Theology* "Ecclesia Scoticana", 88

Unread?

There are readings of the world which are strangely absent from Forrester. His social/public theology gives little attention to environmental themes. For someone whose early work focused on caste, he has little to say about racism within Scottish/British society. For an avowedly ecumenical theologian working in Scotland there is little about sectarianism.

It is also fair to say that Forrester reads the world more often through the work of social scientists and economists, rather than through references to film, television, popular culture, sport, literature or the arts.

CHURCH AND WORLD

Ecclesiology in Forrester's Theology

Duncan Forrester is an ecclesial theologian. In 1988, he wrote that "A theology which does not take the Church seriously is fundamentally defective"¹⁸². His insistence that the church is the primary location for theology has been a constant in his writings over the past three decades. His ecclesiology reflects a dynamic mix of reformed, ecumenical and liberationist influences which are called together in support of the church's quest to perform and practice its 'true' identity¹⁸³, to *be* the church.

The Church and the Kingdom

While Forrester, as a committed social scientist, is clear that the church must be studied as a human institution¹⁸⁴, he also asserts that the church "is more than an institution among others" and that its significance as an institution "is entirely derived from the Kingdom which it proclaims and the nature of which it is intended to exemplify in a partial, but nevertheless real, fashion".¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Forrester 1988, TP, 165

¹⁸³ c.f the title of Forrester's 1997 book *The True Church and Morality*

¹⁸⁴ so: "The Church visible cannot but be an institution and institutions relate to other institutions and to people in terms of power. This is an unavoidable fact about the Church which is at once its glory, its danger and its responsibility. It cannot be wished away and must not be forgotten or the whole understanding of the Church and its function in society is distorted." Forrester 1988, TP, 51

¹⁸⁵ Forrester 1989, BVP, 14,15

The problem for the Christian church is how to speak and act in the public arena as the church, how to proclaim the Kingdom rather than defend the interests of an institution, how to show that it is other than one social institution among many, but the sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God.¹⁸⁶

His resistance to accounts of ecclesiology which he regards as sociologically reductionist is seen clearly in his 1989 volume on *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, where he reacted strongly to the ecclesiology of the Anglican Board of Social Responsibility report *Changing Britain*. The report chaired by John Habgood had emphasised the 'functional' role of the church as "guardian, purveyor and exemplar of the values that hold society together", prompting a rare exclamation mark in Forrester's normally elegant and measured prose:

It is as if Emile Durkheim had been invited to write our ecclesiology!¹⁸⁷

In an important reflection on the problematic of the church speaking out for its own institutional interests, Forrester accepts that it is legitimate for the church to claim the space to live and the freedom to proclaim the gospel, but continues:

... even these should not come at the top of the church's priorities. We should learn from the experience of the German Confessing Church in the 1930s which resisted Nazi attempts to control the church and claimed autonomy in its own sphere, narrowly defined, long before it recognized the holocaust of the Jews and others as *the* great issue for the Christian conscience and the Christian faith. The freedom which the church of Jesus Christ may claim for herself must not be so circumscribed and turned in upon itself that it becomes impossible for the church to *be* the church...In claiming freedom for itself the church claims freedom for all.¹⁸⁸

In this as in all aspects of its life Forrester claims that "The practice of the church strives to anticipate the practice of the Kingdom"¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Forrester 1989, BVP 52

¹⁸⁷ Forrester 1989, BVP, 44; c.f Forrester 1988 TP 53 where he raises similar objections against Habgood's 1983 book *Church and Nation In a Secular Age* "the arguments are almost all sociological rather than theological"; this book is also discussed by Forrester in his chapter on the Public Role of the Church in his 1985 *Christianity and the Future of Welfare*

¹⁸⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, 54

¹⁸⁹ Forrester 1990, Tpr, viii

The Church and the Powers

Integral to the Church's witness *to* the Kingdom in Forrester's work, is its witness *to* and struggle *against* 'the principalities and powers' – the spiritual powers which characterise 'demonic systems' within the world. The church, he believes, "has a message for and a responsibility towards the powers".¹⁹⁰ However, it dare not forget that "in our society the church and the powers are not entirely separate and distinct" and there is a continual need to discern when the risks of collusion with the powers require Christians to withdraw from participation in a political system or to refuse to obey orders.¹⁹¹

The church's witness to the powers includes its pastoral ministry to the powerful. Forrester accepts the need to reckon with the realities and limitations of what can be achieved by decision makers and with the need for compromise, but he insists that "The powerful need to be helped by the church to resist the specific temptations that go with their responsibilities" and that ministry to the powerful must be "at the same time pastoral and prophetic".¹⁹²

The Public Church

The need for the church to be itself *in public* has been a central theme of Forrester's work. In his 1985 book, *Christianity and the Future of Welfare*, Forrester devoted a chapter to "The Public Role of the Church Today". He began with a frank recognition of decline and the way it had diminished the public influence of the churches as well as the churches' confidence about their public role.¹⁹³ During the decades of consensus on welfare since the war, the churches had given "warm but unspecific" endorsement. In the more abrasive and combative climate of the 1980s, they were struggling to enter the fray.¹⁹⁴ They now had to *win* the right to be heard by the strength of their contributions. Forrester was clear that Britain could no longer be called a Christian country, but

¹⁹⁰ Forrester 1989, BVP, pp71-72

¹⁹¹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 75-76

¹⁹² Forrester 1989, BVP, 69

¹⁹³ Forrester 1985, CFW, 62-63

¹⁹⁴ Forrester 1985, CFW, 64

argues, in a formulation which both evokes John Baillie and disavows his use of Eliot/Maritain conceptuality:

It is a fundamental thesis of this book that the Christian church has a continuing responsibility, drawing on the riches of its tradition, to commend social values capable of acting as a basis for a healthy plural society and that it can do this without advocating a retreat from pluralism in the direction of a revived Christendom.¹⁹⁵

Forrester suggested that there were three main possibilities before the churches in 1980s Britain: the New Right option of privatization¹⁹⁶; the option of clinging on to “the vestiges of establishment as if they were essential for the public relevance of the gospel”¹⁹⁷; and a third position¹⁹⁸ which he suggests may be able to combine the closeness to power of an establishment model like that of John Habgood¹⁹⁹ with the closeness to the poor of a ‘prophetic’ church such as that modelled by (again his examples are English and Anglican) David Sheppard and David Jenkins.²⁰⁰

This ‘third way’ reveals a tension and ambivalence at the heart of Forrester’s project of developing a public ecclesiology. He is prepared to accept an organized ‘civil’ role for the church:

For a weak and declining church the attempt to cling on to old patterns of establishment represents a trap and a temptation. But a church which knows that it is not legitimate for it to evacuate the public realm and is aware of the dangers and seductions as well as the opportunities that lie there, *still has prudently to organize its relation with the state. Unless it is willing to fulfil some at least of the functions of a civil religion and work within an established and recognized relationship with the state, the church is scarcely able to*

¹⁹⁵ Forrester 1985, CFW 66

¹⁹⁶ Forrester 1985, CFW 69

¹⁹⁷ Forrester 1985, CFW 69

¹⁹⁸ The text is not very clear where this third possibility is described..

¹⁹⁹ John Habgood, then Archbishop of York published his *Church and Nation In A Secular Age* in 1983. Forrester describes it here as a “shrewd and moderate” defence of the present form of establishment of the Church of England. In *Theology and Politics* he points out that the arguments in this book “are almost all sociological rather than theological. One can in other words justify the establishment model in terms of the responsibilities and opportunities it presents, but it is more difficult to defend it in the categories of ecclesiology.” Forrester 1988, TP, 53

²⁰⁰ Bishops of Liverpool and Durham respectively in 1985. Sheppard’s 1983 *Bias to the Poor* was a key text of British social theology, incorporating insights from Liberation Theology and applying them to UK society, especially to urban settings; Jenkins had been an outspoken critic of the Thatcher government during the 1984 miner’s strike.

*'speak truth to power' and is in danger of abdicating one of its God-given responsibilities.*²⁰¹

This 'ecclesiological realism' follows in the tradition of John Baillie and Reinhold Niebuhr in its distrust of 'voluntary' understandings of the church and in its tendency to characterise them in terms of withdrawal from public life and political involvement:

Where the Church is not involved to a significant extent with the political society in which it is set and operates as a kind of voluntary organization for people who happen to be interested in religion, its pronouncements are likely to be highly general and rather vacuous. Because it is not itself a functioning part of the political system, it is easy for it to avoid the questions of agency, means and implementation and concern itself entirely with long term goals and values.²⁰²

However, alongwith this acceptance of the church's role in civil religion, Forrester also insists that it must continue to be prophetic.

The Prophetic Church

In *The True Church And Morality*, Forrester offers his strongest account of the church as an alternative community, quoting Tertullian on the alien status of Christians in the world and drawing comparisons between the counter cultural church of the early pre-Constantinian centuries and the post-Christendom context of the church today.²⁰³ He defends Alasdair MacIntyre's neo-Benedictine vision at the end of *After Virtue* and cites Thomas Merton's account of 'critical monasticism' to show how it can be understood as a missional and ecumenical vision.²⁰⁴ He also invokes Vaclav Havel's notion of 'living in truth' within "an alternative polis", concluding:

What Havel and MacIntyre and Merton are saying points to ways of being the church more characteristic of the early church than of the mainline churches during the centuries of Christendom. It may also be the seedbed for a certain kind of believing and way of life which call for a certain kind of theology. This is not an ideology which authorizes systems of power by linking them to the divine order. It has less to do with internalizing obedience and reverence for the system than with sparking off questioning, dissent, resistance. (12)

²⁰¹ Forrester 1985, CFW, 72 emphasis added

²⁰² Forrester 1988, TP, 153

²⁰³ Forrester 1997, TCM, 5-7

²⁰⁴ Forrester 1997, TCM, 7-9

The Ecumenical Church

Forrester is both something of a Reformed partisan and champion of the ecumenical ideal. His early commitment to ecumenism in the SCM was both strengthened and infused with realism by his time in the Church of South India. He argues that the Bible presents the church as a sign and anticipation of the unity of humankind.²⁰⁵ The concrete provisional ecumenical existence of the church is a crucial dimension of the relation between the actual church and the 'true church':

There is, however, a sense in which the church as it is now, an institution deeply implicated in our society, fragmented, compromised and often unfaithful is called to speak for the true church, the bride of Christ, without spot or wrinkle or any such defect, the great church, or the coming church. This is part of that it means for the church to speak *as* the church and *for* the church. One dimension of this is that church leaders and synods are today aware in a way few of them were in the past that they really belong in the world church, that already in a real but partial sense the ecumenical church exists.²⁰⁶

The ecumenical church, is for Forrester, "the great new fact in the churches' orientation towards the public realm"²⁰⁷ and the global ecumenical movement provides a unique forum in which the ethical weakness of churches speaking only for the national interest is exposed.²⁰⁸ He recognises that there are formidable problems with the attempts of official ecumenical forums to develop critical and articulate social theology²⁰⁹ but suggests that a certain incoherence to the WCC's ethical thinking is the price to be paid for a conversation in which a broader range of voices, especially voices from poor countries in the South are heard.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Forrester 1997, TCM, 2-5

²⁰⁶ Forrester 1989, BVP, 55

²⁰⁷ Forrester 1989, BVP, 57

²⁰⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, 58

²⁰⁹ Forrester 1997, TCM, 42

²¹⁰ Forrester 1997, TCM, 27-43

The Church as Hermeneutical Community

Forrester views the church as the primary hermeneutical community for the interpretation of scripture.²¹¹ He affirms the emphasis of the liberation theologians that “the Bible can only be read aright in a church community which is in fact engaged in true Christian praxis”²¹² along with their emphasis on theology “as a function of the church”.²¹³ In a society where ‘nobody knows that justice is’, the church is called, through its stewardship of scripture to be a place where “disturbing memories and hopes of a more just future are nurtured”.²¹⁴

These were significant things for the New College Professor of Practical Theology to be expounding in the 1980s – because they pointed strongly back towards the church at precisely the time when the place of a more ‘confessional’ approach to theology and biblical studies within the Scottish universities was coming under critical pressure.

The Church As Moral Community

In the 1990s as Forrester becomes involved in the WCC Ecclesiology and Ethics study programme (1994-1996), there is an increasing emphasis on the church as a community of moral formation. The first explicit statement of this idea came in his 1989 book *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, where the church is portrayed as:

...a believing fellowship which, while it may transcend space and time, has a *face* (or rather faces) in our land. This fellowship is also a community of moral discourse which among other things, concerns itself with social values, goals and norms.²¹⁵

Forrester argues that the church’s ethical role goes beyond acting as a discourse community and consists also in its exemplary role in validating its own discourse by means of its practice:

²¹¹ In 1997, he cites Lesslie Newbigin’s description of ‘the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel’. Forrester 1997, TCM, 4

²¹² Forrester 1988, TP, 99

²¹³ Forrester 1988, TP, 80

²¹⁴ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 59

²¹⁵ Forrester 1989, BVP, 14; see also *ibid.* p96:

Ultimately it is the life of the church which plays a major role in validating or denying the statements made. Only a church which is taking seriously the need for its own inner life to express the Kingdom and its righteousness can speak to the public domain with a right to be taken seriously.²¹⁶

This theme returns strongly in *The True Church and Morality* where he speaks of the 'need to live out the unity and *shalom* that Christ has won'. We must 'become the peoples and the communities that we already are in Christ.'²¹⁷ 'The being of the church, its inner life and its outward organisation, should confirm and exemplify the gospel that it preaches'²¹⁸. The twentieth century church struggles against Nazism and apartheid are key examples of the church insisting on costly unity in the face of injustice and accepting the necessary divisions in its own life which resulted.²¹⁹

Forrester has urged the church to "rediscover itself as a forum for moral discourse" arguing that "a new kind and a new quality of reflection on public policy was becoming possible in churches which are realistic about their own situations, theologically serious, cogent in argumentation, attentive to the facts, and willing to pioneer".²²⁰ He finds evidence of this from the UK context in the way in which reports such as *Not Just for the Poor* (1987)²²¹, *Faith in the City* (1985)²²² and *Just Sharing* (1988)²²³ used ecclesial emphases on "the priority of fellowship and the nature of *koinonia* in opposition to... theories of possessive individualism... and callous collectivism".²²⁴

His most concentrated reflections on this theme are found in *The True Church and Morality* (1997). One significant detail from this book in the context of this thesis, is Forrester's decision to use "as a kind of motto for this book some words of my friend, the ecumenical veteran Ian Fraser":

²¹⁶ Forrester 1989, BVP, 63

²¹⁷ op cit 15

²¹⁸ op cit. 16

²¹⁹ op cit 13-25

²²⁰ Forrester 1989, BVP, 96-97

²²¹ Anglican Board of Social Responsibility, London, 1987

²²² Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, Lambeth 1985

²²³ Church & Nation Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Forrester/Skene ed. 1988

²²⁴ Forrester 1989, BVP, 99

"I have argued all along that there is no subject or discipline which can be labelled 'ethics'; there is just the vivid interplay between theology (as the faith-basis for changing history towards the kingdom) and concrete reality, which should issue in imaginative communal obedience. Ethical behaviour is a struggle for the church to be the church."
 Ian Fraser²²⁵

Here he argues that "the existence of the Body is in itself a moral statement, a demonstration and exemplification of the ethic which is integral to the gospel" and quotes Hauerwas's famous claim that the church 'does not have, but rather is a social ethic'.²²⁶

Forrester is however, concerned that an overemphasis on the church as moral community could lead to a sinful introversion, to its becoming '*incurvatus in se*'. He is doubtful about Hauerwas' challenge to the idea 'that Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable or just'²²⁷ and warns that worship can too easily become an escape from a world of injustice.

Despite this, he sees a crucial role for worship in moral formation, affirming baptism and eucharist directly in Hauerwas's terms as "the essential rituals of our politics" and their liturgies as "our effective social work".(59) The ethical significance of these rituals is underlined in a discussion of how the caste system and the foreign missionary-indigenous believer divide affected how they were performed in India.(62-75) *The True Church* closes with a affirmation of the church's role in ethical formation, which is attentive to Hauerwasian themes of character and virtue as they are formed through the narrative tradition of the church.(76-84) Forrester is convinced that "the two great institutions of modern society – the market and the state – have singularly failed as agencies of moral formation". They each have indispensable functions, but true moral formation is

²²⁵ no source given, quoted in Forrester 1997, viii; this is one of only two "intertexts" I have found between the two figures; something which seems surprising given the friendship Forrester alludes to, the congruence of their concerns and the relevance to Forrester's project of Fraser's work at SCH and his subsequent work with the WCC, Selly Oak and Scottish Churches' Council on "reinventing theology as the people's work" and researching Basic Christian Communities. Perhaps this is related to Fraser having published relatively little and Forrester's tendency as an academic to quote from published sources?

²²⁶ Forrester 1997, TCM, 3

²²⁷ Forrester 1997, TCM 48

possible “only in intimate fellowships of reciprocal responsibility and accountability”(85) and in the ecumenical relationships between them (87).

The Church and the Poor

Shaped by his experiences in India and by his intensive engagement with liberation theology, Forrester’s work has continually emphasised the need for the church to engage with the concrete situation of the poor, locally and globally. His 1980s work for the *Just Sharing* report exemplified this as did a number of CTPI consultations. He notes bluntly that:

It is hard for the church to speak for the poor because the church has so little firsthand knowledge of what the poor want to say. Before one can speak for someone else one has to listen.²²⁸

Where the church experiences marginality, it may be interpreted in the light of Hebrews 13, suffering with Christ ‘outside the camp’ as a sign of identification with Head.²²⁹

The Church In and Of Scotland

Duncan Forrester’s direct reflections on the church in Scotland and his own Church of Scotland are surprisingly rare.

In *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, he takes the example of the Church of Scotland’s evidence to the 1969 Kilbrandon Commission on the constitution as an example of an inadequate engagement by the church with issues in Scottish public and political life.²³⁰

... it is now absurd to identify the Church of Scotland with the church in Scotland

He asks whether a church, can or should represent a nation and express national feeling?²³¹ But this is hardly answered – all we are offered is a question

²²⁸ Forrester 1989, BVP, 60

²²⁹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 97

²³⁰ Forrester 1989, BVP 59

²³¹ Is Forrester at this time already supervising Will Storrar’s thesis??

about whether its role is not rather to proclaim the gospel *to* the nation, in which case he adds that:

.. there is an absolute need, if we are to speak to the nation for the church not to be seen as detached, uninvolved or even disloyal..(60)

His most extended published reflections on the Church of Scotland come in the 1999 article *Ecclesia Scoticana*, where he defends the existing model of ‘establishment’ as it has evolved in a more ecumenical direction as still the best hope for maintaining a vision of the church playing a leavening and prophetic role within national life.²³²

The Church To Come

Finally, Forrester’s ecclesiology maintains a clear eschatological dimension. The church of Jesus Christ is not ‘at home’ in the world; its members are “exiles and pilgrims, people who do not belong here, but who seek their true homeland, the city whose builder and maker is God”.²³³ The true and ultimate Christian vision is of fellowship with the triune God and “the church is called to be a kind of preliminary manifestation or earnest (*arrabon* = downpayment) of that vision”.²³⁴ In the life and worship of the church we already have a “foretaste.. of the coming of God’s new order”.²³⁵

Church and World in Forrester/CTPI

How are the themes of church and world linked in Duncan Forrester’s theology and in the practice of CTPI during his time as Director?

Because the articulation of this relationship has been the dominant theme of his entire theology, one way of addressing this question is through the ‘narrative’ of his life and work and of the work of CTPI already offered in this chapter.

²³² *Theology* CII, No 806 – March/April 1999

²³³ Forrester 1989, BVP, 95

²³⁴ Storrar ed. 2003, 114

²³⁵ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 247

Church and world are linked by his own practice, in the ‘public’ embodied practice of a particular life engaged in Christian ministry, theological education and political activism. They are linked in his witness as a public figure engaged in debate and dialogue within and beyond Scotland. So Stanley Hauerwas, in his essay to honour Forrester can apply Yoder’s language about the need for ‘permeable’ borders between church and world to Forrester himself: praising him for becoming “for the world the kind of ‘permeable boundary’ God desires.”²³⁶

Church and world are linked too by his texts and by the texts of CTPI in relation to which he was ‘editor-in-chief’. He has written and published a great deal more in the area of social/public/practical theology than either of the other two figures whose work is considered in this thesis. He is, to borrow a term from Biblical Studies, a ‘writing prophet’, whose work within the academy has committed him to relate church and world through the medium of text – engaging theology and society both through his own wide reading/reception of theological and political texts and through his production of theological-political texts.

Moving inside his theological project, his account of the church-world relation can be best characterised by a mix of positive and negative assertions.

1. Forrester’s work is decisively shaped by his conviction that the terms for the relationship between church and world are set by God. Despite his talk of fragments, Forrester works with a classical understanding of the Christian story as a meta-narrative, whose basic shape is trustworthy because it has been revealed by God. The world comes from God and it will go to God and the church has a decisive role to play in the movement of the world into God’s future. The world’s eschatological destiny is indefeasible but within this, church and world are always at risk of disobedience. The most fundamental way of characterising the church-

²³⁶ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 296

world relation in Forrester would therefore seem to be in terms of *mission*. The church's first responsibility is to bear witness to the gospel in the world and all of its activities and practices belong within that primary calling.

2. Theology, however, as the church's self-understanding cannot simply go forward as a deductive, unilateral enterprise. Andrew Morton puts it well in his recognition that In Forrester's work, "persuasive speaking" to the world is insistently paired with "attentive listening" to the world.²³⁷ The church's mission itself must therefore be understood in dialogical or hermeneutical terms. The rhetoric of the *kerygma* and the practice of bearing witness must be repeatedly contextualised through our reading of the world. The theoretical moment in practical theology is always poised after and before practice. As theory, it also has a double character in which theology operates with the social sciences as its principal dialogue partner.
3. There is also a strongly holistic aspect to Forrester's account of the church-world relation, which insists on situating particular instances of the relation within both *ecumenical* and *global* horizons – horizons which are ultimately one in the eschaton. Theology in Forrester's project must always reckon with being held accountable before God to the whole church and the whole world. Each part of the church is also bound to seek the fullest possible provisional realisation of this idealised holistic vision in its own practice, through the development of institutions and practices which help it to maximise its attentiveness to marginalised contexts and to set its own life in the context of the ecumenical catholic church.
4. Given that theology is in MacIntyrean terms a traditioned activity, which must persist in extended historical arguments about orthodoxy and orthopraxis, Forrester's own judgment favours the broad account of the church-world relation given within the Calvinist-Reformed tradition, while embracing the insights of liberation theology as a crucial corrective to that

²³⁷ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 27

tradition and insisting on an ecumenical orientation for its future development. In terms of specific actors and representatives of that tradition, Forrester continues to hold up Reinhold Niebuhr as an outstanding example of relating faith to public life.

5. Despite defending the church's ability to deploy a relatively comprehensive version of the basic Christian narrative²³⁸ within worship, Forrester does not believe it can extend this with the same confidence into 'public life'. There can be no grand theological theories of justice. The old method of middle axioms no longer works. The grand synthesis once envisaged between theology and Marxism is no longer tenable. Given the fragmentation of public discourse and the clash of incommensurable traditions, all the church can do is offer 'fragments' of theological truth to help shape and build as good as possible a consensus about public policy within society. He maintains, however, that these fragments or perhaps the church's own traditions or narrative identity (if this is the quarry he speaks of?) remain robust enough in moments of *kairos* to ground particular prophetic responses to extreme challenges.
6. Forrester believes that "the time is probably past.. when a 'Christian map of reality' can be constructed"²³⁹ and is also dismissive of the search for a new Christendom²⁴⁰ which occupied T.S. Eliot (and Baillie and Maritain) suggesting "that kind of political theology has had its day with the recognition that Christendom has passed away beyond recall". He advocates the "urgent need for a post-Christendom political theology, more akin presumably to Augustine or Tertullian than Eusebius".²⁴¹ One possible model for that is Charles Péguy's²⁴² fluid combination of *mystique* and *politique*, in which the church as guardian of the *mystique*

²³⁸ eg the liturgies of baptism or communion

²³⁹ Forrester 1988, TP, 157

²⁴⁰ "At its best, Christendom was an exploration of a question which had not occurred in the early days of the Church" how may Christian rulers responsibly and piously use their power to the glory of God and the welfare of God's people? At its worst, it would appear that Christendom was not so much the 'establishment' of the Christian faith as its subversion." Forrester 1988, TP, 29

²⁴¹ Forrester 1988, TP, 55

²⁴² French Catholic social thinker and activist – 1873-1914

aims to offer the mix of vision, motivation and sustaining community necessary to healthy political involvement.²⁴³

7. Forrester upholds the Niebuhrian distinction between those forms of social organization which can be based on 'love' and those which must be based on 'justice', but also wants to overcome the opposition between those two terms by speaking of 'justice as a form of love'.²⁴⁴ In 1997, he wrote "It really is not possible to conceive of a polity run on the principles of love alone. In collectivities larger than the family – and, even there, much of the time – we have to deal with justice as a form of love".²⁴⁵ Forrester's position seeks to combine Niebuhrian realism about love (justice is all we can aspire to in large groups) with a Liberationist promotion of justice (justice is what we must aspire to), while drawing on Feminist reconstructions of love to challenge accounts of justice which are too narrow and 'thin'.
8. In the Scottish context, while recognizing the "pervasive and profound secularization that has taken place since the 1960s" Forrester claimed in 1999 that "there still seems to be a central role for the Church of Scotland in mobilizing and co-ordinating Christian witness and service in relation to Scotland":

Despite changing circumstances, it seems to me that the Scottish form of establishment, especially as it has developed in a more ecumenical direction in recent times, protects the space that the Church requires to *be* the Church and is a constant reminder of the need to engage with the principalities and powers with the life of the nations as well as with the inner life of the Church. And this works powerfully for the good of Scotland. Even in a time of rampant secularization in a post-Christendom era, 'twa Kingdomes' continue to exist in Scotland and the tradition of their relation which has roots in the Mediaeval period and was defined at the time of the Reformation continues to have vitality and usefulness. As Scotland moves towards home rule with the establishment of the Scottish parliament and possibly beyond that to independence, the Scottish tradition of relating Church and state may well show itself to be challengingly relevant in the 21st century, even if the Church is a small minority seeking to be the salt of the earth and the leaven of the lump.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ The mystique/politique account of this relationship is first and most fully set out in a 1986 paper for the conference on *Scottish Churches and the Political Process* and subsequently reprised in 1988's *Theology and Politics* and in 1989 *Beliefs, Values and Policies*. see Forrester 1989, BVP, pp98-101; Forrester 1988, TP 165-168

²⁴⁴ See his discussion of Niebuhr, Miranda, Weil, Tillich and Woodhead in Forrester 1997, CJPP, pp214-225

²⁴⁵ Forrester 1997, CJPP, 139 – the same wording appears again on p220 in a discussion of Niebuhr's position

²⁴⁶ "Ecclesia Scoticana – Established, Free or National?" *Theology* CII, No 806 – March/April 1999 p88

A Living Conversation With Hauerwas

Hauerwas and Forrester are friends. Hauerwas contributed an essay to the 2004 *festschrift* for Duncan Forrester²⁴⁷ on the theme of “punishment” which engaged with Forrester’s work and the work of CTPI on “penal policy”. Introducing that essay Hauerwas says:

It is my hope that the focus on punishment will provide a way to explore what some, including Duncan himself, may think to be differences between us on matters concerning the responsibility of Christians to the societies in which they find themselves. Duncan has graciously expressed appreciation for the kind of questions I have been pressing against Christian accommodation to liberal social arrangements. Yet he is a good Scot. He has worked tirelessly as a representative of the Church of Scotland to help Scotland to be a more just society. Contrary to what some may think I should think as a representative of Christian non-violence, I applaud Duncan for the work he has done for social reforms in Scotland. For example, he has thought hard as well as helped encourage prison reform in Scotland.

The work Duncan and his colleagues has done for reform of Scottish prisons is the kind of work Yoder would encourage.²⁴⁸

One of Duncan Forrester’s expressions of appreciation for Hauerwas was of course, some years earlier, the provocation for Gustafson’s famous denunciation of Hauerwas as representing the ‘sectarian temptation’. Hauerwas’ appreciation of Forrester is genuine and in keeping with the protocols of *festschrift* his essay on punishment gives serious and appreciative attention to Forrester’s accounts of the CTPI working group. What is interesting, however, is the way in which a key critical perspective put forward by Hauerwas in this essay, while directed at the work of Avery Dulles, can also be read as posing a challenge to Forrester’s own ‘public’ theology. Hauerwas questions whether Dulles’ willingness to accept a double ethical standard for church and state in relation to the punishment of offenders does not smack of Lutheran ‘two kingdoms’ thinking.²⁴⁹ While Forrester’s lack of sympathy for ‘Lutheran’ approaches to the church-world relationship has been made clear on repeated occasions, it is hard to see that Hauerwas’ criticism of Dulles would not apply equally to his own ‘Calvinist’ articulation of that relationship. Hauerwas, following

²⁴⁷ Chapter 17 “Punishing Christians” in Storrar & Morton ed. 2004

²⁴⁸ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 286

²⁴⁹ Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 292-293

Yoder, has in view any theological perspective which offers a theological justification for asking less of the state than it does of the church.

While Hauerwas applauds Forrester's record of wholehearted Christian and biblical engagement with the world, the key issue which must continue to divide them is Hauerwas' refusal to sanction the state's use of violence and coercion and Forrester's acceptance of the right of the state, or in certain circumstances the liberation movement, to bear the sword (according to some form of just war criteria) and exercise coercion within a legitimate context of democratic control. If the question of non-violence is made decisive, as it is for Hauerwas and Yoder, everyone who does not sign up to this, including Forrester, will automatically be seen to have accepted a variation of the 'Lutheran' position, which allows something called "the state" or "public life" to exist at a greater ethical remove from the cross and resurrection of Christ than the life of the church.²⁵⁰

There is therefore, at the heart of the conversation between these two theologians, a crucial theological divergence over the church's position on the legitimacy of violence and coercion. On the way to that divergence, however, there are many areas of shared interest and common ground, as well as further differences in emphasis and judgment.

Both theologians (and both have at different times been charged with being 'ethicists' somewhat outside the full definition of a 'theologian') share a huge regard for Barth and Bonhoeffer and continually return to the German Church struggle of the 1930s as a defining example of the church's resistance to the idolatrous claims of secular power. Both follow Barth in their common sense of theology as orientated to the whole of reality because of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ.²⁵¹ Both have been profoundly influenced by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and have developed their own theological projects since the early 1980s in an ongoing mostly appreciative dialogue with MacIntyre's work.

²⁵⁰ c.f Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 292

²⁵¹ Forrester 1989, BVP, 12 and parallel Hauerwas quote from WGU?

However, they differ markedly in their reception of liberation theology. Forrester has been a strong advocate of liberationist perspectives from the early 1980s, while Hauerwas has been highly critical of the 'humanistic' character of the accounts of liberation and justice within liberation theology. They differ too in their levels of sympathy towards the traditions of the radical reformation and the anabaptist theology of John Howard Yoder. Despite the Gustafson episode and Forrester's specific defence of Hauerwas against the charge of sectarianism²⁵², Forrester's work rarely engages with Anabaptist perspectives in any detail and offers repeated cautions about the pitfalls of 'voluntary' understandings of church. Hauerwas on the other hand is deeply influenced by Yoder and wants to see 'Catholics' becoming more 'anabaptist'.

They differ too in their enthusiasm for the contribution of the social sciences. Hauerwas has strongly endorsed John Milbank's critique of social theory, makes little use of perspectives from the social sciences and is critical of their secular presuppositions. Forrester is not persuaded by Milbank's position and regards the social sciences as theology's principal dialogue partner.

A further area of difference lies in their attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church and in particular towards the encyclicals of John Paul II. Hauerwas regards him as a key witness within the 20th and 21st century church and has a strong in principle regard for the teaching authority of the *magisterium* in relation to the work of theology. Forrester seems to find little to admire in the papacy of John Paul II, disliking his political conservatism and his censure of liberation theologians. He has never commented in print on his position on episcopacy *per se*, but he clearly continues to place a high value on the more open and 'democratic' polity of Presbyterianism. His enthusiasm for Roman Catholic theologians is conspicuously confined to 'dissidents' who have clashed with Rome. Hauerwas has written extensively on Aquinas and rarely refers to Calvin. Forrester regularly invokes the Calvinist tradition and rarely engages with Aquinas.

A theme which unites them is their shared emphasis on the importance of practice, both drawing on Aristotle and on MacIntyre's treatment of Aristotelian

²⁵² in *Truthful Action* 56

themes. They also agree on the crucial formative role of ecclesial practice, in worship and congregational life, areas in which Forrester acknowledges Hauerwas as a key influence. They have, however, developed this emphasis on practice in different directions. Hauerwas has emphasised the importance of practice for formation in the virtues, but is notoriously 'quiet' on issues of social justice. Forrester in contrast, insists on commitment to social justice as a criterion of 'orthopraxis', arguing for example, that without justice, the eucharist loses its meaning.

In respect of ecclesiology, there is a shared conviction that theology is an ecclesial discipline before it is an academic one. Hauerwas places a greater emphasis on the church as *polis*, as itself a politics and as the primary political community which alone is truly public. Forrester partially endorses this position, agreeing that the church has a key role as sign and anticipation of the kingdom, but is unwilling to place so much emphasis on the church as political community at the expense of recognising the state as political community. While recognising a certain priority in the church's vocation, Forrester typically characterises the public sphere as a secular environment broader than the church, within and toward which the church must exercise a public ministry.

In terms of theological method, we have suggested that Forrester continues to deploy a 'classic' meta-narrative of 'the Christian story' despite his option for the language of 'fragments'. Hauerwas, by contrast, openly promotes the meta-claims of 'the Christian story' and argues that the church needs to recover its narrative confidence in its engagement with the world.

Conclusion

Duncan Forrester's work as a Scottish practical theologian has earned him a strong international reputation and the Centre for Theology and Public Issues has been a template for similar institutions established throughout the world since the 1980s. It is Forrester's work more than that of any other Scottish theologian which has insisted on 'the political service of theology in Scotland'²⁵³ and which from 1978, reoriented academic practical theology in Scotland

²⁵³ Forrester's title for his retrospective assessment of CTPI in Storrar & Donald ed. 2003

towards concerns for church and society. He has sought, without distancing himself from it, to reform his own reformed tradition in response to the critique of liberation theology and to insist on its necessary future orientation towards ecumenism. If the outstanding feature of his published work to date is the leadership he gave to a theological critique of Thatcherism and the New Right in the 1980s, its most notable weaknesses may be a certain lack of concreteness in relation to the situation of the church in Scotland (and the wider UK) and a reticence in his own political theology to move beyond a welfare agenda to examine broader issues of authority and democratic legitimation as they became prominent in Scottish politics from the mid 1980s and into the devolution debates. That said, Forrester's considerable body of writings will remain a rich and profound resource for many years to come, for those seeking to articulate a practical theology of church and world.

Chapter 5

Post-Christendom Church? Post-Secular Scotland?

In this final chapter, I begin with a critical summary and assessment of the three episodes described in previous chapters before moving to consider the current state of the tradition of reformed theological reflection on church and society in Scotland. I then suggest how a practical theology of church and world might be reformed in the light of the dialogue between Hauerwas and this Scottish reformed tradition.

Church and Society in Reformed Theology in Scotland - From Baillie to Forrester

Central to this thesis is a 'reading' of the tradition of Practical Theology within Scotland since 1939. The influential¹ work of Donald C. Smith² and Stewart J. Brown³ on the 'social witness'/'social criticism' of the Church of Scotland in the early decades of the twentieth century, portrayed a tradition in 'bad order', characterised by an disturbing mixture of quietism in the face of demands for social justice and active sectarianism in relation to Irish Catholic immigration. I have argued in chapter 2 above, that this hugely important recovery of a 'repressed' narrative may have obscured the radical currents of protest and dissent growing outside (and inside)⁴ of the Church of Scotland in organisations like the SCM and YMCA and being nurtured in emerging ecumenical networks by figures such as William Temple, Dick Sheppard⁵, J.H. Oldham and George MacLeod. A fuller account of this radical/progressive tradition of social thought in Scottish church life is still awaited, but it is important to keep it in view, because it was decisive in producing what Will Storrar calls the 'moment of grace' which was the Baillie

¹ Smith's and Brown's analyses have now become 'canonical' and contribute a discrete episode to the social history of 20th Scotland.

² Smith 1987

³ see Brown 2000 – his analysis appears in earlier essays and studies e.g. his paper in CTPI Occasional Paper 31 on the Baillie Commission

⁴ since these 'parachurch' organisations had a strong influence on those within the Church of Scotland

⁵ elected Rector of Glasgow University in 1937 in preference to Winston Churchill!

Commission.⁶ The Baillie Commission is important because it functions ‘redemptively’ within an official tradition which most commentators (theologians and historians alike) regard as having become degenerate in the 1920s and 1930s. Widely acclaimed at home and internationally, the best-selling Commission reports combined with those of Oxford 1937 and Amsterdam 1948 to provide a substantial deposit of ‘theological capital’ for the post-war church. Prescient and insightful in many areas, the Commission reports were at their weakest in trying to achieve a fresh articulation of the relationship between church and society in areas like (non-Catholic) education, where the influence of all the Scottish churches was waning. John Baillie’s comments on Barth’s 1943 *Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe* at the close of his 1945 lectures “What is Christian Civilization?” display the conviction that the redemption of that tradition could be achieved ‘conservatively’ through an ‘open’ adaptation of the Calvinist/Knoxian vision of the godly commonwealth (with a stout defence of the practice of paedobaptism which was seen as integral to that vision) to the post-war reconstruction of Scottish society. Here the Commission’s⁷ and Baillie’s ability to imagine the church’s role otherwise seem at their most constrained. Their acute sense of the state as ideologically and spiritually contested meant that talk of a retreat from influence was unthinkable. Their confidence in the formula of the Articles Declaratory left them convinced that such influence must be pursued through the providential establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland. Despite the central place given to the rhetoric of ecumenism within the Commission reports, the capacity of the reformed churches to imagine themselves other than they were was to prove minimal. A theological elite from the Church of Scotland would discover that limit when they embraced an Episcopal re-imagining of *the* church, but could not persuade *their* church to follow. What no-one within the Kirk, not even Karl Barth’s most ardent admirer, was able or willing to do was to imagine the Church of Scotland as a free church, disavowing the rubric of establishment, committed to believer’s baptism, re-forming itself for

⁶ Storrar 1994, 72

⁷ the Commission reports contain a robust defence of paedobaptism and of the role of the national church.

mission to a post-Christendom Scotland. Their inability to imagine this is perhaps less incredible than Barth's insight in proposing it?

After the Second World War, with the state taking an unprecedented lead in responding to the social welfare of the British population, the churches embarked on their own ambitious programme of reconstruction, with the Church of Scotland pouring resources into church extension as new housing areas were established, creating the Tell Scotland movement as a vehicle to mobilise the churches for evangelisation and delegating a theological elite to negotiate an ambitious ecumenical rapprochement between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. By the end of the 1950s, church extension was slowing, Tell Scotland was unravelling into evangelical and liberal polarities and the Anglo-Scottish ecumenical flagship was dead in the water. Practical theology in Scottish academic settings tended towards ecclesial introversion and posts were filled by men who were teaching, but hardly publishing or engaging in broader 'public' conversations about Scottish society. As moves towards institutional union stalled, ecumenical activists, inspired by achievements of sister churches within Europe turned their attention towards the church's engagement with society. Ian Fraser, a student of John Baillie during the Commission years was recruited in 1960 to head up the new ecumenical initiative at Dunblane. Scottish Churches House was the epicentre of theological work on church and society in Scotland for a decade. The rigour of its/Fraser's methodology remains impressive, even intimidating, and his commitment to lay education, training and participation in theological dialogue throws into relief the continuing struggle to enable this in mainstream churches. Also noteworthy is Fraser's ability to start⁸ and to join conversations about social, cultural and political issues in Scottish life. Engaged, energetic, optimistic – Scottish Churches House was a bold and creative attempt to “make the enabling church concrete”⁹ amid the cultural turbulence of Scotland in the 1960s. Yet, its

⁸ Richard Rorty has famously objected to Christianity's role in public life because it was “a conversation stopper”

⁹ Elizabeth Templeton's verdict on the house's achievement in her glowing (“bliss was it in that dawn to be alive”) foreword to Fraser, 2003

achievements, however justly celebrated, need to be set alongside other features of church and theology in 1960s Scotland. Its best work took place as the wider church entered upon a precipitous decline in attendance, adherence and membership.¹⁰ Fraser was overly optimistic and idealistic about the achievements of both the Labour party and successive Labour governments within Scotland. His aversion to what he saw as the needless theological polarisation which divided Tell Scotland, hindered him from seeing that the centre was not going to hold and that evangelical suspicions about the 'Trojan horse' character of the ecumenical project would combine with liberal suspicions about the theological consensus at its heart¹¹ to harden theological divisions within Scotland in the coming decades and promote a mutually reinforcing erosion of support for the 'Niles/Maury/Newbigin' ecumenism on both sides. The place of Scottish Churches House in this narrative, also has to reckon with the failure to extend its/Fraser's project either geographically or historically. Far from being the first of a national network of ecumenical lay academies, SCH failed to act as midwife to any similar initiatives in Scotland and its own reputation and status declined inexorably in the 1970s after Fraser left for Geneva.

Within the universities, practical theology in 1970s Scotland remained quiet on church and society issues, with the exception of some quietly strategic work done by Steven Mackie at St Andrews on questions of home rule and governance in the years leading up to the first devolution referendum.¹² John Vincent established the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield in 1973, with George MacLeod there to open it, but nothing comparable emerged in Scotland.¹³ An evocative parable of the times is Lesslie Newbigin's final return from India in 1974, when he began his influential re-entry into UK and Western church life with a three-month sojourn in Edinburgh

¹⁰ This much is commonly agreed; whatever the reasons behind it (and many dispute Callum Brown's thesis) and whether the decline reflected longer term trends – the statistics display a peak in the late 50s and a rapid decline from the early 1960s.

¹¹ cf the Edwards quote on p 142 above

¹² Will Storrar, unpublished PhD thesis and private conversation; the early 1970s had seen George MacLeod and Malcolm Muggeridge elected as Rectors at Glasgow and Edinburgh universities, but their experience in the post was not entirely happy – with their conservatism on sexual ethics attracting significant student opposition.

¹³ Ferguson 1990, 381

reading through the whole of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in preparation for his move to teach missiology at Selly Oak College in Birmingham. It was, he commented later "a needed preparation for the much more difficult missionary experience which lay ahead."¹⁴ In 1977, the Iona Community closed its famous mainland base at 214 Clyde Street which had been the nearest thing to an urban equivalent of Scottish Churches House. One of MacLeod's successors as Leader of the Community, Ron Ferguson, commented that:

It was a difficult decision... because Community House had been one of Glasgow's most celebrated meeting places. Its role had been changing... The heyday of "classes" in a city centre location was well and truly over and political meetings generated little excitement. That era of optimism about the possibilities of radical social and political change – in which the Church had an important part to play – was at an end. The Church was seen to be in decline, no longer attracting men and women who could hold their own intellectually in any company; it was relegated to a private "religious" sphere inhabited by those timid and nostalgic souls who liked that sort of thing.¹⁵

From the mid 1970s the new theological currents of European political theology and Latin American liberation theology were beginning to be felt within Scotland and Robin Gill's work at Edinburgh was introducing a new synthesis of theology and sociology. This was the setting for Duncan Forrester's return to Scotland and a new drive to promote theological engagement with public policy issues in resistance to the new Right thinking of the Thatcher government. Forrester's work moved academic practical theology in Scotland into a new position of leadership and strategic influence in relation to church and society issues, with the establishment of CTPI in 1984 a crucial institutional marker of this renewed engagement. It did this however, in the context of continuing rapid decline in church membership and participation within Scotland, with the Roman Catholic Church beginning from the 1980s to mirror the well-established downward trends in the Protestant churches. The renewal of evangelical social ethics dating from the 1974 Lausanne Congress began to feed through into Scottish church life in the late 1970s and 1980s, with

¹⁴ Newbiggin 1993, 228

¹⁵ Ferguson 1990, 393

Jim Punton¹⁶ and Bob Holman¹⁷ as leading protagonists, but overall, evangelicals in the Church of Scotland were less influenced by the Lausanne movement than their Anglican counterparts.¹⁸ Free Church of Scotland Professor of Systematic Theology Donald Macleod emerged as a powerful critic of the government during the Thatcher years through his editorials in the *Free Church Monthly Record*, which attracted considerable public attention in Scotland, perhaps due to a wider cultural fascination with what was perceived as their unlikely provenance.¹⁹

The three episodes and figures considered in this thesis in no sense exhaust Scottish reformed or ecumenical engagement with church and society questions in the period 1940 to 2000. (A fuller account of that aspect of 20th century Church History would, at the least, require a major treatment of the work and influence of the Iona Community and a detailed survey of the reports of the Church of Scotland's Church & Nation Committee and their reception in the church and nation.) Their importance lies in their status as key examples of a tradition of theological engagement with church and society, which display a strong degree of theological continuity, despite their different locations in church, inter-church and academy and their different methodological emphases.

This claim can be filled out through a more 'synoptic' assessment of all three examples. Naming the theological tradition at work here is not straightforward: John Baillie is best known as a 'systematic' theologian, but has also been analysed as a 'social theologian'²⁰; Ian Fraser is most often described as an 'ecumenical'

¹⁶ Church of Scotland minister/theologian who worked with Frontier Youth Trust, the radical 'urban' wing of Scripture Union

¹⁷ former Professor of Social Policy at the University of Bath who left academic life to work as a community activist, first in Bath and then, from the late 1980s in Easterhouse in Glasgow. Holman took part in CTPI consultations in the 1980s and maintained a relatively high public profile within the British left due to his regular columns in the Guardian newspaper.

¹⁸ When Scottish evangelicals set up their own thinktank/study centre Rutherford House in 1982, its engagement in public policy and social ethics was concentrated on issues of medical and bio-ethics, particularly abortion and euthanasia. An evangelical exception to this was Chris Wigglesworth, lecturer in Practical Theology at Aberdeen University, but he published little on church and society issues in a Scottish context. John Drane, a Baptist academic working at the University of Stirling, pursued an important and distinctive line of research into missiological responses to alternative spiritualities and new age religious movements in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹⁹ In what must count as one of the strangest ever episodes in Scottish 'public theology' MacLeod gave evidence to the 1994 Public Enquiry into a proposed Super-Quarry on Harris alongside Quaker activist Alastair Mackintosh and Native American eco-sage Sulian Stone Eagle Herney; Mackintosh 1995

²⁰ Forrester's description in Morton ed. 199

theologian; Duncan Forrester is variously described as a ‘social’, ‘practical’ or ‘public’ theologian or as a ‘Christian ethicist’. In terms of their location on the theological spectrum, the description of ‘orthodox liberal’ applied by David Fergusson to John Baillie²¹, could easily be extended to all three figures. All three stand within or close to what Edwards calls the ‘ecumenical theological consensus’ of the mid twentieth century. All three have been influenced by Karl Barth, although Ian Fraser sits more lightly to this than the others. On the political spectrum, all three can also be claimed as ‘Christian Socialists’, although the claim should be made more cautiously for John Baillie.²² Baillie clearly endorsed the post-war programme of the Labour Party, Fraser was a Labour councillor in the 1950s²³ and a life-long party member and Duncan Forrester has been active in the Christian Socialist Movement. They can all therefore be firmly associated with the ‘welfare state’ project of the post-war British Left to promote increased social justice and social equality in British society. All three were key figures in seminal initiatives which addressed the relation of Church and Society in Scotland. In each case, they worked to show how Christian theology should directly influence the development of government policy. None of them were pacifists and all accepted the need for the state to ‘bear the sword’ and exercise a coercive role within society.

One of the key findings of this study has been the high priority given to ecclesiology in the thinking of each of these theologians. They worked as ministers and members of the Church of Scotland who maintained a critical appreciation of the strengths of the Reformed tradition in Scotland, while insisting on a firmly ecumenical orientation for their own ministry and theological work. All three emphasise the divine origin of the Christian church and its crucial role within the economy of salvation. All three emphasise the role of the church as sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God and its calling to serve as a provisional representation of God’s intention for all humanity. All three regard the ecumenical movement as crucial to the church’s present and future ability to respond to this

²¹ see Ch 6 in Fergusson ed. 1993

²² Stewart Brown documents one instance of Baillie identifying himself in these terms.

²³ He stood again as a Labour candidate for the local council in 2004 in protest against the war on Iraq.

calling. All three believed the church's prophetic role need not involve a total abandonment of the Church of Scotland's 'established' position within Scottish life. All three remained committed to the practice of paedobaptism and were prepared to see Presbyterian polity incorporated into a mixed ecumenical polity which would include a form of personal *episkope*. In keeping with the point made about their theological loyalties, all three saw the relation of theology to Scottish society as a missiological task and saw the internal life of the church as crucial to the integrity of the church's message.

Differences between them emerged in a number of areas. Of the three, only Baillie fully embraced the concept of middle axioms – Fraser and Forrester emphasised the importance of concrete dialogical encounters between theologians/churchpeople and policymakers – which moved between an overall horizon of 'social vision' and specific proposals for 'social action'. Fraser offers the most optimistic reading of the 'world' of Scottish society, while Baillie's wartime perspective is more critical of Enlightenment/Renaissance liberal humanism and more Augustinian in its reckoning with radical evil in human existence. Forrester's social anthropology develops an Augustinian/Barthian account of human sinfulness in a more Marxist direction, emphasising the need to resist relationships of domination and exploitation in a context of class conflict. Fraser offers the most 'realised' eschatology and is the least open to apocalyptic, while Baillie's and Forrester's more agonistic accounts of social reality remain more open to apocalyptic interpretation and more dependent upon a future eschatological resolution. All three theologians have affinities with a Niebuhrian approach to social theology, although Niebuhr's close friend John Baillie is most critical of his love-justice distinction and Forrester offers the strongest endorsement of Niebuhr's theology. None of them, however, are as vulnerable as Reinhold Niebuhr himself to the charge that his position is critically damaged by a deficient ecclesiology.²⁴

²⁴ A charge made by Hauerwas, but also by Robert Song and Reinhard Hutter

Baillie is the most sympathetic to the historical possibilities of a revised Christendom and Fraser the most strategic about re-structuring the church for national mission, while Forrester is the most sanguine about the church's need to restrict its ambition to making more fragmentary contributions to public life.

The 'State' of the Tradition

Following this critical synopsis, I now turn to consider the state of theological reflection on questions of church and society in contemporary Scotland. (Not forgetting of course that Duncan Forrester remains an active and influential figure within the tradition.)

In the past decade, overlapping with the end of Duncan Forrester's time at CTPI, the most important contributions to the Reformed tradition of Scottish theological thinking about church and society have come through the work of Forrester's successor, Will Storrar, Professor of Practical Theology at New College from 2000 to 2005 and in two key books by David Fergusson, current Professor of Divinity at New College, Edinburgh.

Will Storrar forms another link in the genealogy we have been tracing. He was a young divinity student at New College in 1978, intending to do honours in Church History, when he attended Duncan Forrester's inaugural lecture as Professor of Practical Theology. Inspired by Forrester's vision for the future of the discipline, he switched his honours option to Practical Theology. During the 1980s, while working as a Church of Scotland Parish Minister, Storrar became increasingly involved in the new wave of interest in Scottish Studies and of constitutional/political activism which arose in response to the failure of the 1979 referendum on devolution.²⁵ He began his doctoral work on theological understandings of Scottish identity in 1986, under the supervision of Duncan Forrester. In 1987, he was appointed by the

²⁵ "It was the experience of failed support for devolution in the 1979 referendum that prompted some Scottish Christians to revisit the basis of the Church of Scotland's support for Scottish self-government. This reflection led them to see the urgent need for the critical retrieval of their own Reformed tradition of theological reflection on power and its relevance to their particular constitutional dilemmas" Storrar in Storrar & Morton ed. 2004, 423

General Assembly to the influential post of Convenor of the Church and Nation Committee. Storrar's work on a theological reading of Scottish identity aimed at the articulation of a specifically Scottish 'political theology', which addressed the constitutional questions of 1980s Scotland by arguing that there was a distinctive Scottish understanding of limited popular political sovereignty, present in native traditions of legal and political theory which were theologically based. This work would play an important part in the formulation of the 1989 Church & Nation report, which was influenced by Storrar's doctoral work and included what he describes as a 'middle axiom' in the form of a call for 'democratic control of Scottish affairs through self-government'. Storrar has argued recently that this constitutes an example of a 'revised, interactive middle axiom' which is free from "the deductive and elitist faults that Forrester finds with this method".²⁶

While still a parish minister and with his doctoral work on the subject as yet unfinished, Storrar published in 1990 a seminal text *Scottish Identity – A Christian Vision*. In this book, Storrar set himself an ambitious, perhaps impossible task – to undertake a theological reading of Scottish identity from pre-Reformation times to the 1980s. The book offered a theological reading of Scottish history, tracing a series of 'visions' of Scottish identity – the Catholic vision, the Reformed vision of a godly nation, the secular vision of a moral nation. It also sought to present what Storrar called here "a biblical ecology of nationhood"²⁷, which amounted to a nuanced and provisional declaration of theological support for nationalism. Finally, it offered a critical account of Scottish ecclesiology, developed over a time-frame of five centuries, which culminated in a claim that the Church of Scotland should for both missiological and political reasons, abandon its modern claim to represent the nation²⁸ and focus its efforts on working ecumenically as a 'confessing church'²⁹ which would "remain very much a national Church in its mission and concern but

²⁶ in his chapter in the Forrester festschrift, Storrar & Morton ed. 2004 423-4 and in an overlapping article in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17:2 "Scottish Civil Society and Devolution: The New Case for Ronald Preston's Defence of Middle Axioms" pp37ff

²⁷ Storrar 1990, 127

²⁸ Storrar describes the Third Article Declaratory here as 'heretical'

²⁹ Storrar 1990, 222

from within the circle of a more self-consciously separate Christian community”³⁰. The theological defects and damaging political consequences which adhered to an older ‘theocratic’ Christendom vision in which church and state were over-identified, were, in Storrar’s argument, to be purged from the Reformed tradition by a new concentration on Christology and on the Kingdom of God, which would set ecclesiology in its proper perspective, while also clarifying the basis on which the church should seek to offer critical support to the state.³¹

Storrar’s prominence within the movement for devolution, his subsequent rise to a prominent academic position within Scottish theology and the rarity of books offering specific theological reflection on the Scottish situation have meant that the book has been widely cited within both theological and sociological literature on Scotland in the past fifteen years.³²

It was however, as Storrar himself recognises, an uneven book, produced under pressure in the “spare time” of a parish minister. Its strength lies in the rich trove of theological insights, historical details and cultural references and in the eloquent literary style of many individual passages – its weakness is its attempt to say too much about too many things over too many centuries and to open more historical, theological and political fronts than he can do justice to. In particular, his attempt to reframe the relationship between ecclesiology and Christology is underdeveloped, his adoption of Ian Henderson’s metaphor of the Scots “transposing political and national realities into an ecclesiastical key” is made to do far too much historical duty³³ and his vision of the incarnational, confessing church is notably abstract and formal.

He was to substantially refine and develop his analysis in his completed PhD (also supervised by Forrester), which has unfortunately never been published. Storrar has in fact published relatively little in the fifteen years since *Scottish Identity* and no major sole authored work, with the result that the while the book has had a

³⁰ *ibid.* 223

³¹ *ibid.* 244-245

³² eg the work is cited by Beveridge & Turnbull (1997, p113), Harvie (1998, 234, 247), Callum Brown (1997, p185), Fergusson (2004, 185)

³³ Storrar 1990, 33

relatively long afterlife its relevance and usefulness have diminished in the absence of a substantive follow-on or second edition. Alongwith Canon Kenyon Wright, he was one of the best known church figures within Scottish political life in the 1980s and 1990s, closely involved in the work of the broad based campaign group Common Cause and the work of the Constitutional Convention which prepared the way for devolution.³⁴ From the mid 1990s, with the case for devolution made and accepted across a broad spectrum of Scottish opinion, one of his main pre-occupations became the consolidation of Scottish civil society, as his attention moved from the formal enactment of constitutional devolution, to the substantive social and civil conditions which would enable the healthy functioning of democracy. He was pursuing “a civic theology for civic politics” and in recent years, has been an advocate for the term ‘public theology’ as a description of the project of CTPI.³⁵

Storrar’s work as both academic and activist, while it never involved running for office, puts him in company with a relatively small number of Reformed ministers and theologians who have become highly integrated into networks of policy discussion and formation in Scotland. An apparently inspired choice as successor to Duncan Forrester at New College and CTPI, just as the new Scottish Parliament was created and installed next door to his own office, Storrar’s voice as a “public theologian” never sounded out as strongly post-devolution as it did pre-devolution and his surprise departure in July 2005 for a prestigious post in Princeton³⁶ created a noticeable theological gap in the Reformed theological response to the devolved parliament.³⁷

Storrar’s activism in Scottish politics and civil society may have sometimes been at a certain cost to producing publications on those issues which engaged with

³⁴ For descriptions of this work see Hearn pp 23ff; Ascherson 2002; Fergusson 2004, 165; Forrester 2000, pp182ff; Storrar & Morton ed 2004, pp 408ff

³⁵ see his paper “The Cost of Citizenship – Towards a Theology of Civil Realism” collected in CTPI Occasional Paper ?? and his chapter in Storrar & Morton ed 2004, “Where the Local and the Global Meet”

³⁶ following another Church of Scotland minister and Scottish academic, Ian Torrance who became President of Princeton Seminary in 2004

³⁷ The example of Christopher Harvie however, shows how voices can still sound clearly into Scotland from positions of voluntary exile..

broader theological and philosophical currents. In this respect, the more recent academic initiatives in Reformed theology on questions of political theory/theology and the relation of church and society within Scotland have been taken by David Fergusson, first while Professor of Divinity at Aberdeen (1990-2000) and subsequently as Professor of Divinity at New College in Edinburgh (2000-). Fergusson is of particular interest within this study because he has followed Forrester in showing a significant interest in the work of Stanley Hauerwas and offering a critical response. Fergusson's first discussion of Hauerwas occurs in his 1998 book *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* – this was followed by a 1999 article in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.... In 2004 he published *Church, State and Civil Society*, based on the 2003 Bampton Lectures in Oxford.

In *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, Fergusson offers a theological reading of the liberal-communitarian debate, taking up a mediating position which seeks to defend a tradition-based approach to epistemology and ethics along the lines suggested by MacIntyre, while maintaining a philosophical defence of moral realism and advocating a critical retrieval of aspects of the liberal project. He notes the linkage between “recent communitarian approaches to Christian ethics” and “radical Reformation ecclesiology”³⁸ in the work of John Yoder, James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas and devotes a chapter to the work of Stanley Hauerwas as an exemplar of “ecclesial ethics”.³⁹ This chapter represents the fullest sustained engagement with Hauerwas' work published by a Scottish theologian to date. Fergusson appreciates Hauerwas' stress on the role of the local congregation and defends Hauerwas against the charge of ‘sectarianism’ but argues that “the principal weakness in Hauerwas' theology is its overdetermination of the distinctiveness of the church” which leads to “an attenuated reading of the person and work of Christ, and a reluctance to describe the possibility of ethical perception

³⁸ Fergusson 1998, 9

³⁹ Fergusson 1998, Ch 3 pp48-79; Fergusson adopts the term “ecclesial ethics’ from Reinhard Hütter's 1993 article in *Pro Ecclesia* 2, 433-50 ‘Ecclesial Ethics, the church's vocation and paracletic’

and action outwith the Christian community”⁴⁰. He detects in Hauerwas “a slide from Christology into ecclesiology”⁴¹.

In his review of the book for the University of Virginia’s *Lived Theology Project*,⁴² Willis Jenkins judges that Fergusson finds Milbank and Hauerwas compelling, but that he is “hesitant, still bothered by classical liberal worries”:

..he worries that the trajectory of this sort of thought can at times tend toward an isolationism that ends up rendering the church irrelevant to the world (the worry of James Gustafson), or worse, toward an intolerance for alternative social arrangements that can lead to religiously-sanctioned coercion and violence (the worry of John Rawls).⁴³

Hauerwas’ own appreciative review of the book⁴⁴ declares that Fergusson “has read me well” and hails him as a fellow Barthian (the wounds of a friend are precious?). In response to Fergusson’s criticisms of his ecclesiology/ Christology/ pneumatology, he argues that his own emphasis on the church has been “an attempt to display how Christ’s person and work makes possible our formation by the Spirit” and disarmingly admits that his account of the Holy Spirit may well be flawed. However, in response to Ferguson’s rejection of the church as “the extension of the incarnation”⁴⁵, Hauerwas affirms that formulation as rightly gesturing towards “how through the Church we are taken up in God’s salvific purpose”. (Interestingly, he rather than Fergusson is in agreement with the Baillie Commission and John Baillie here.) Hauerwas neatly observes that “a realist account of moral concepts (which he supports) will not give you what Fergusson seems to want – namely an argument that in principle moral consensus will be possible”. He reserves his sharpest criticism for Fergusson’s “half-hearted” case for ‘residual liberalism’ suggesting that he cannot have as much of MacIntyre’s critique of liberalism and still go back for what is left. Fergusson, he suggests is making a case for dodging traffic in the city!

⁴⁰ Fergusson 1998, 67

⁴¹ Fergusson 1998, 72

⁴² an interesting qualifier for theology, which I had not encountered before.

⁴³ review found at www.livedtheology.org

⁴⁴ In SJT 53/1 2000, pp119-121

⁴⁵ Fergusson 1998, 69

Appearing six years later as Fergusson's next sole-authored book, *Church, State and Civil Society* demonstrates his continuing pre-occupation with themes of ecclesiology, ethics and the public role of religion. It is a book which without often citing O'Donovan's work, reflects the major impact made by his *The Desire of the Nations* in reframing 'political theology', but it also reflects more recent extensive reading into the new wave of literature from the sociology of religion, drawing in particular on the work of José Casanova, Michael Walzer, David Herbert and Grace Davie. Fergusson argues that political theologies, reflecting their provenance in the early modern 'state-making' era, have placed too much stress on the relationship between church and *state*. Debates about establishment and disestablishment, about 'national' churches 'representative of the Christian faith of the... people' reflect this narrow and increasingly outmoded conflation of the *polis* with the state and a corresponding view of the church as "the state's exclusive partner"⁴⁶. Without endorsing strong claims for the difference disestablishment will make to the missiological effectiveness of churches, Fergusson reiterates Storrar's 1990 call for the revision of Article III of the Declaratory Articles, claiming this will be a "creative political and ecumenical gesture" which "could contribute to a rethinking of the Kirk's identity and mission".⁴⁷ Ultimately, while he accepts that British society is now living through "the twilight of establishment", he is unconvinced that an acceptable alternative has yet been convincingly articulated. In the short term, the most unacceptable aspects of establishment should be reformed, but a weakened form may still be the favoured option of a spectrum of faith communities until a consensus emerges on more radical change.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Fergusson, 2004, 139, and 164: The older model of church and state as the two dominant institutions cooperating in a close and exclusive partnership is now well past its sell-by date."

⁴⁷ Fergusson, 2004, 185

⁴⁸ Fergusson 2004, 187 ff

In terms of the social and public witness of the churches, he suggests that the way forward lies in attending to the broader concept of ‘civil society’ and understanding the church’s position *within* and its multi faceted relationship *towards* civil society.⁴⁹ He reads the “theological significance of civil society” in terms of ‘solidarity’ and ‘subsidiarity’ and draws on research into church contributions to civil society to support a key ecclesiological assertion:

In relation to ecclesiology, this confirms the local congregation as the primary form of the body of Christ in the world.... The church’s ability to express a judgment in the wider political arena will require broader forms of church government and the appointment of persons skilled in this field. But the capacity to do this effectively will depend upon the health of congregational life.⁵⁰

In this way, despite the loss of national status, Christian groups can continue to “promote the common good and make a distinctive public contribution”.⁵¹ For the Church of Scotland, the sting in the tail, reflecting his earlier call for the repeal of Article III, may be one of his closing sentences:

Ecclesologically, our future resides in recognising the primacy of voluntary, congregational and gathered communities. Only as this occurs on the ground will Christian theology find the necessary empirical expression and institutional base from which wider social engagement can take place.⁵²

This judgment and his earlier discussion of “the church’s contribution to moral formation”⁵³ display a rather more positive reading of Hauerwas than was evident in the 1998 book.

More generally, Fergusson wants to broaden the transformative and confessional orientation of Reformed political theology by appealing to elements of the Thomistic natural law tradition and in particular, by a making more use of the concept of the ‘common good’.⁵⁴ His recent work on the philosophy of John MacMurray is reflected in his invocation of MacMurray’s legacy of social personalism in

⁴⁹ For Fergusson’s extended references to civil society see 139, 144-150, 162-4

⁵⁰ Fergusson 2004, 149; in support of this he cites Margaret Harris’s research in the UK: *Studies in Christian Ethics* 15 (2002), 45-59 “Civil Society and the Role of UK Churches: an Exploration” and similar earlier research in the USA by Verba, Schlozman and Brady *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1995)

⁵¹ Fergusson 2004, 165

⁵² Fergusson 2004, 194

⁵³ pp98ff – this section contains an additional discussion of Hauerwas

⁵⁴ c.f Fergusson 2004, 139, 144

expounding the biblical ideal of solidarity.⁵⁵ Fergusson goes beyond Forrester's fondness for citing the example of Barmen in offering an important detailed analysis of the theology of the Barmen confession and in contrast to Forrester, offers a detailed and sympathetic reading of the papal encyclicals from Vatican II onwards.⁵⁶ Another difference from Forrester, lies in his apparent lack of interest in the continuing contribution of Latin American liberation theology. Overall, with a few well-chosen exceptions⁵⁷, Fergusson's dialogue partners are principally British and North American.

Fergusson's book is a key text for the future of Reformed theological engagement with 'public issues' in Scotland. While his institutional location is as a 'systematic theologian', Fergusson stands in the tradition of Baillie and displays a Barthian sense of the unity of dogmatics and ethics. His work demonstrates an interdisciplinarity which subverts any sense of a rigid systematic-practical divide in Scottish theology.

There are some clear lines of convergence between the argument of Fergusson's book(s) and that of Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*, published almost simultaneously in 2004. Together they represent a strong defence of a modified political liberalism and of the importance of democratic norms. Both are wary of strong versions of communitarianism, although Stout is much less sympathetic to MacIntyre than Fergusson. Both have reservations about Milbank and Hauerwas, although Fergusson hardly engages Milbank⁵⁸ and is more sympathetic to Hauerwas, particularly in the 2004 text.

Fergusson's use of the terms 'hard secularism' and 'soft secularism' has strong affinities with Stout's distinction between "secularist" and "secular" accounts of the public realm. Stout's more 'political' adjudication of trends within the American academy offers a direct summons to Rawlsians to abandon 'hard secularist' positions and rethink liberalism in a way which is hospitable to religious reasoning.

⁵⁵ Fergusson 2004, 148 There is no I without a 'you' and no fulfilment except in communion with other persons.

⁵⁶ Fergusson 2004, pp116-139

⁵⁷ Kwame Bediako, Charles Villa-Vicencio,

⁵⁸ He seems to have made a deliberate decision to ignore Milbank, perhaps on irenic grounds?

Fergusson had already addressed similar questions in his 1998 study and his 2004 work restates his critique of liberalism and his support for a politics of ‘recognition’ and ‘compromise’ within a plural social order, where as Wolterstoff argues, “sufficient agreement” may still be achieved, without suppressing civilly expressed diversity.⁵⁹

My principal reservation about *Church, State and Civil Society* is whether “civil society” may promise more than it can deliver. At times it appears to function in Fergusson’s account (as in Storrar’s earlier work) as a ‘new space’ which will in principle be more open and hospitable to the church’s mission. Grounds for caution about that may lie in criticisms from the left about the use of the language of ‘civil society’ to mask issues of domination which were more sharply expressed when the language of class (for all its problems) was to the fore. In theory the two discourses do not cancel each other out, but in practice there seems to be a certain displacement effect. There may also be theological grounds for caution, of the kind William Cavanaugh expresses in his *Theopolitical Imagination* and Stephen Long offers in *The Goodness of God*, that the evidence of ‘civility’ required may still reflect an unacceptable degree of “secularist” censorship.⁶⁰ One form of this can be seen in the way Rasmusson (1995) suggests the potential ambivalence of the concept for Hauerwas, noting on the one hand that “the critique of the rationalist, etatistic project and the newer developments in social thought that I have outlined [civil society], create an intellectual space that makes Hauerwas’ theology more intelligible and plausible”⁶¹, but also recognising that:

The most important difference is that Hauerwas makes the church and not the national community primary. There will always be an uneasy relationship between a church as Hauerwas understands it and accounts of the civil society that evaluate its effects in terms of how it helps the current nation-state and liberal democracy to function. On the more empirical level he is also more pessimistic than either Berger and Neuhaus or Walzer and Wolfe about the long-term sustainability of these practices and institutions in modern liberal societies. He is consequently more critical of the dominating role of the market and generally of accepting its autonomy, than is Berger and Neuhaus, more suspicious of the

⁵⁹ Fergusson 2004, Ch 3 “Crises of Liberalism” – pp62, 64, 71

⁶⁰ Long 2001, pp8off; Cavanaugh ???

⁶¹ Is this reflected in Fergusson’s more sympathetic portrayal of Hauerwas in the second book?

emancipatory ideologies than Wolfe and Gorz and does not share the establishment perspective (even if oppositional) they all have in common.⁶²

A further reservation about Fergusson's account concerns the use he makes of the striking wave of recent revisionist work on 'secularisation theory' in the sociology of religion by Casanova, Berger, Davie, Herbert et al. asserting variously, the "de-privatization of religion", the "re-politicization of religion", the "re-normativization" of the public sphere, the "de-secularization of the world", the "persistence of institutional religion". It is perhaps inevitable that such perspectives should be taken hold of with a sense of relief by those in the churches who have felt themselves on the sharp end of previous sociological verdicts. I wonder, however, whether the news that perhaps 'the tide is turning', while it may be received gratefully as the work of providence or the reward of patience, may not tempt us to underplay the practical-rhetorical response the church is called to in the face of secularism? My query is whether it may not become the temporal co-ordinate to civil society's reassuring spatial function?

A final reservation about Fergusson's approach has to do with what could be described as a tendency to 'over-police' responses he fears may be excessive. It could be convincingly argued that in the present climate of 'furious religion' and the rhetoric of 'clashing civilizations', such moderation and intellectual discipline are exactly what is needed. There are times, however, when Fergusson's theological instincts can seem too tightly controlled, giving an impression of conservatism which belies the radicalism of many of his conclusions. This shows itself in his comment near the end of *Church, State and Civil Society* when he maintains that:

However, the future of the church should not be represented in purely or even mainly countercultural terms. The allure of a distinctive, even exotic faith community with its own traditions and resources witnessing to (and usually against) the regnant liberal order will prove irresistible to some.⁶³

⁶² Rasmusson 1995, 369; Fergusson reviews Rasmusson's book in SJT 53/1 pp126-129

⁶³ Fergusson 2004, 193

This goes beyond ‘dry’ to a kind of sarcasm (“exotic”) which seems to patronise (“to some”) and ‘put down’ those who ‘can’t resist’ excessive ecclesiologies, but it also risks suppressing the prophetic notes which more measured perspectives may find harder to strike. The admiration expressed in the text for the ‘excessive’ ethical witness of Gandhi and King needs to be weighed against the possibility that theirs too was a ‘mainly counter-cultural’ witness against a ‘regnant liberal order’.⁶⁴

The Future of the Tradition – A Critical Response

In this final section of the thesis, I draw together my reading of the three key examples of Reformed engagement with church and society, my assessment of the current state of the tradition and my reading of Hauerwas to chart a way forward. In keeping with the pattern of previous chapters and the nature of the examples, I again follow the rubric of world, church and church-world.

world

Hauerwas argues that the world needs the church if it is to be “known and given a history”.⁶⁵ Beyond the provocation of his rhetoric, the three examples discussed in this thesis, as well as the work of Will Storrar and David Fergusson are agreed that the human story and therefore Scotland’s story cannot be fully understood without reference to the gospel.

Recalling John Baillie’s contention that Christianity is nothing else so much as it is a philosophy of history, we noted above that the work of the Baillie Commission was essentially ‘hermeneutical’ – it sought to interpret ‘the present crisis’ in terms of God’s will. While it is impossible to ever do theology in ways which do not involve an implicit reading of the world (dogmatics always entails an ethics and a politics), it is constitutive of *practical* theology that it is explicit about its attention to the world, about its ‘copulative’ concern with church *and* society and about its awareness that this attention is essentially hermeneutical. Despite the different modes of

⁶⁴ In view of what follows, this could of course be seen as special pleading – an *apologia pro vita mea!!*

⁶⁵ Hauerwas 1995, 33n4 “There is no world unless there is a church, nor can the world have a history without the church. That is why the church knows the world better than the world can know itself.”

attentiveness and the different methodological emphases present in the work of Baillie, Fraser and Forrester this hermeneutical intent is common to them all. None of them intended a 'neutral' reading/telling of the world or of 'Scotland as world', all in principle intended a Christian reading/telling.

The effect of comparing these examples of ecclesial and theological hermeneutics with Hauerwas' claims is to apply critical pressure to their hermeneutical assumptions about how to read and interpret Scotland. A key issue which then emerges is the extent to which, within an overall vision of God's redemptive purpose in Christ, there can be a proper autonomy to discourses which are not explicitly theological. In this respect, perhaps surprisingly, Baillie emerged as the most sharply critical of Enlightenment humanism and Fraser as the most affirming of it. Forrester's position was more ambivalent, tending on the one hand towards a stronger critique of modernity in his support for MacIntyre while also being the most explicit about the key role of the social sciences in general and 'empirical method' in particular.⁶⁶

A similar balance can be seen in David Fergusson's work, where a strong appreciation of MacIntyre's work co-exists with the contention that:

Christian social theology must seek new forms of engagement. A route must be found which embraces evangelical faithfulness but which is comprehending of our current social condition and this route will need to avoid the perils of demonising the world and of assuming a Christian monopoly upon the truth. The criticism is sometimes made that theology is too easily captivated by sociological analysis. The view adopted here is the opposite. There has been insufficient attention to sociological work, particularly in our theological syllabi, with the result that we make too many assumptions of an impressionistic sort about the nature of the societies in which we live.⁶⁷

Fergusson's point about sociology lines him up self-consciously on one side of the debate about the theological programme known as *Radical Orthodoxy* and in particular of debates about the work of John Milbank's iconoclastic magnum opus *Theology and Social Theory* (1990). It positions him alongside both Duncan

⁶⁶ This may also reflect the greater influence of Barth on Forrester, since Barth while refusing ultimately to take secular/scientific disciplines seriously in their unbelief, was less convinced about the need to seek specifically 'Christian' knowledges of the world in non-theological spheres. (see p ?? above)

⁶⁷ Fergusson 2004, 160

Forrester and Will Storrar in a strategic rejection of Milbank's main thesis – that theology (and sociology) needs to be liberated from its captivity to secular reason and that this must involve a decisive rejection of the claims of modern social science because “in effect theology encounters in sociology not only a theology and indeed, a church in disguise, but a theology and a church dedicated to promoting a certain secular consensus”.⁶⁸

At this point it is worth taking one further backward look at the Scottish tradition we have been exploring, with an eye to the evolving relationship between theology and the social sciences in the twentieth century and even earlier. There is of course a hugely significant early tradition of ecclesial involvement in undertaking pioneering ‘social surveys’ of Scotland dating back to several 17th century church sponsored schemes and reaching its fruition in the extensive involvement of parish ministers in the compilation of the (*Old and New*) *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* in the periods 1791-99 and 1834-45 respectively.⁶⁹ Charles Withers comments that Sir John Sinclair who oversaw the First Account was well aware that it was “a project of empirical inductivism along the lines practised by contemporary natural scientists then investigating ‘nature's economy’”. Withers quotes Sinclair's commentary in which he claims:

“The superiority, which the philosophy of modern times has attained over the ancient, is justly attributed to that anxious attention to facts, by which it is so peculiarly distinguished. Resting not on visionary theory, but on the sure basis of investigation and experiment, it has risen to a degree of certainty and pre-eminence, of which it was supposed incapable. It is by pursuing the same method, in regard to political disquisitions, by analysing the real state of mankind, and examining, with anatomical accuracy and minuteness, the internal structure of society, that the science of government can alone be brought to the same height of perfections.” Sir John Sinclair

Withers adds that “the *Statistical Account* should be seen, then, as a work of scientific intent, of national social accountancy and of ‘political anatomy’

⁶⁸ Milbank 1990, 4

⁶⁹ see the historical commentary to the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* by Charles W.J. Withers, Professor of Historical Geography at the University of Edinburgh, <http://edina.ac.uk/stat-acc-scot/reading/intro.shtml> accessed 14.12.05 The *Statistical Accounts* remain crucial sources for Scottish historians, including church historians, but there has been no attempt I know of in the 20th/21st century to offer a theological critique of their approach in a way analogous to Milbank's theological reading of the genealogy of sociology. Again, the heroic isolation of Will Storrar's efforts from within theology is underlined.

investigating the state of 'the body' of Scotland. It was, in all these ways, a work which reflected and directed the rational philosophical interests of its age: as one modern historian has noted, it is a 'remarkable manifestation of Enlightenment idealism at work'.⁷⁰ These citations represent rather a large historical detour away from the main concerns of this thesis and one which cannot be followed further, but they are suggestive both in terms of a neglected seam of historical practical theology which deserves to be researched further and also in the continuing resonances between their approach and those advocated more recently by Forrester and Fergusson.

Moving back towards the historical reach of this thesis, John Milbank consciously connects his own work to an older, English tradition of Christian 'sociological' work, specifically that of the *League of the Kingdom of God* more commonly known as the 'Christendom Group'. Michael Johnston describes the group:

Dating from 1923, it was formed from the remains of the Church Socialist League by Percy Widdington, following the publication of *The Return of Christendom* (1922). The group ran the annual Anglo-Catholic Summer Schools in Sociology at Oxford from 1925-1955 and organised Christendom conferences from 1932. Members and those associated included Lewis Donaldson, Harold Buxton, V.A. Demant, T.S. Eliot, Gresham Kirkby, Lionel Thornton, Maurice Reckitt, Eric Mascall, Dorothy Sayers, Ruth Kenyon, Richard Tawney, William Temple and Michael Ramsey. Published *Christendom*.⁷¹

Ronald Preston says of it that "Its contention was that sociology as a discipline in the British universities operated on assumptions, avowed or implicit, which are incompatible with Christian faith, particularly in its doctrine of man. An alternative Christian sociology had to be created."⁷² While John Baillie was never formally a member, he was close to a number of key figures, read the work of others and worked alongside a number of them in the lead up to Oxford 1937 and later in the Moot. It is not hard to see connections between their concern for the redemption of

⁷⁰ Withers *ibid.* no page references

⁷¹ <http://www.anglocatholicism.org/familytree.html> accessed 14.12.05; While I have not uncovered any published literature from Scottish academic theology in the 1920s, Stewart Mechie's centenary history of Trinity College in Glasgow refers briefly to the introduction of sociology to the theological curriculum in this period. Mechie, 1956 (self-published by Trinity College)

⁷² Francis ed. 1999

sociology and the way in which John Baillie's insistence on the theological/anthropological primacy of the 'chief end of man' and on Christianity's 'meta-theoretical role' as a philosophy of history exercised a significant degree of discipline over the roles offered to sociology, psychology and economics in his work and that of the Commission. It is also significant that Baillie moved into this territory as a philosophical or dogmatic theologian and brought a high degree of philosophical literacy and sophistication to his critique. After Baillie, this level of critical engagement with the theological/philosophical foundations of sociology seems to disappear rather suddenly from Scottish reformed theology. Indeed, in the post-war era of social reconstruction, we find signs of a reversal of this position, with sociology increasingly viewed as a form of knowledge which would discipline theology (and politics) both in terms of enlarging its self-understanding and refocusing or radicalising its practice. In the 1950s, therefore, we find Ian Fraser and Ian Reid coming into New College as guest lecturers in Practical Theology on the relation between theology and sociology. It is no accident that the ministers and theologians most interested in sociology tended to be associated with work in poorer Scottish communities. Sociology was seen as a radicalising or politicising discipline which could be enlisted to help overcome the individualism and conservatism of the church. Since the consultations on theology and sociology based at Scottish Churches House in the 1960s never led to any published work, it is hard to assess how rigorous this engagement was. From the side of 'systematic' theology, neither the existentialist preoccupations of Ronald Gregor Smith nor the Barthian focus of T.F. Torrance⁷³ in this era achieved the same kind of purchase on 'social theology' that Baillie displayed, while Scottish practical theology in this era was more focused on pastoralia. Only with the work of Robin Gill in the 1970s do we see a more intensive engagement with the relationship between theology and sociology and he is more preoccupied with the positive synergies between the two 'disciplines' than the potential for deep antipathy between them. It is significant that

⁷³ Hauerwas' dissent from Barth's lack of interest in securing specifically Christian knowledges was noted above in Chapter One.

in this period of accelerating church decline in Scotland, the valorisation of the church as an alternative and ideal model of sociality which we find in Baillie falls quiet in Scotland. South of the border it was preserved and revived in the 1970s in a continuing Anglo-Catholic tradition of 'Eucharistic socialism' by groups such as the Jubilee Group.⁷⁴ The 'repoliticisation' of Scottish academic theology which we have traced in the work of Duncan Forrester from the late 1970s, was, in its indebtedness to liberation theology, already firmly wedded to the social sciences.

Forrester's work represented a decisive reinvigoration of practical theology in Scotland in the 1980s, but what it failed to do, in common with most of reformed theology in Scotland in this period, was to enter a substantive engagement with the new wave of critiques of modernity and of liberalism which broke upon the western intellectual world. In some respects this is surprising, given the prominence of Barth's theology within Scotland and the way this has been a key resource for so many theological responses to 'postmodernity' (which is of course the (contested) term for the new intellectual and cultural climate referred to) in other countries. The failure to develop a creative 'Barthian' social engagement with postmodernism which would enable a new reading of Scottish society reflects a an overall tendency to engage Barth's work in more narrowly 'dogmatic' terms. T.F. Torrance's work certainly developed a remarkable extended engagement between Barth's theology and the natural sciences, but his influence may also have reinforced a certain blight on the social, ethical and political dimensions of Barth's work.⁷⁵ Again the example of Newbigin re-reading Church Dogmatics in the Edinburgh of 1974 is a powerful and prophetic contrast, given the 'use' he then made of this preparation for a new missionary engagement with British culture.

Reformed theology in Scotland and practical theology as part of that was slow to learn the new lexicon of postmodern discourse in the 1980s and to join the debates

⁷⁴ founded by Kenneth Leech in 1974, those affiliated have included Gresham Kirkby, John Rowe, Rowan Williams, John Saward, John Milbank, David Nicholls, Terry Drummond, Simon Barrow, Judith Pinnington, Sara Maitland and Valerie Pitt. Source <http://www.anglocatholicism.org/familytree.html> accessed 14.12.05

⁷⁵ It is hard for example to trace an academic counterpart to the claim of Geoff Shaw to be pursuing a 'Barthian' project in his political involvement in the 1970s.

around postmodernism. Forrester engages early with the work of Alasdair MacIntyre but never really engages at all the work of Jean Francois Lyotard, whose *Post Modern Condition* was to become a key focal text for broader cultural debates in the 1980s. In his defence, Forrester was 'in the fray' in the 1980s at a time when many of those sucked into debates about postmodernism were experiencing a certain political paralysis in response to Derridean deconstruction. However, the lack of engagement with postmodernism persists through Scottish practical theology in the 1990s and what I have called a 'deflationary' methodological trajectory in Forrester's work – his resort to the language of fragments – emerges as the chief response to postmodernism and the postmodern crisis of socialist theory dramatised by the events of 1989. Storrar's re-engagement with pre-modern theological accounts of sovereignty and his theological defence of nationalism can be seen as 'postmodern' moves, but they were not worked out within the conceptuality or vocabulary of broader debates about postmodernity.

Insofar as practical theology in Scotland had rethought the nature of its task, the chief influence was the work of Don Browning, working within the 'Chicago' (what James K.A. Smith calls the "Tubingen-Chicago" school)⁷⁶ model, where he and David Tracy developed modified versions of Tillich's correlationist model of engagement with culture. Browning's move to describe "a fundamental and strategic" practical theology using what he called "a revised critical correlationist model" has been taken up widely within international academic networks of practical theology alongwith Tracy's rubric of theology's three 'publics'.⁷⁷ Insofar as practical theology in Scotland in the 1990s made the effort to describe and position itself within the theological disciplines, the descriptor 'public' and the method of 'critical correlation' became common identifying features as academics aligned themselves with broader trends in the field.⁷⁸ Forrester, as we noted above,

⁷⁶ Smith 2004, 34-35

⁷⁷ Tracy 1981, Browning 1983, 1991

⁷⁸ Though few academics wrote on method in this period, so references are thin. This was my experience studying PT at Glasgow 1988-1992, during which Don Browning was a visiting scholar.

belatedly made his peace with the term 'public theology', but never embraced (nor disavowed) correlationist language with any enthusiasm.

At this (almost contemporary) point, I want to argue, therefore, that reformed practical theology in Scotland since the 1980s has been deficient in its response to postmodernism and to the situation of the church in postmodernity and that Hauerwas' 2001 Giffords deserve a fuller hearing and theological response within Scotland than they have been given. What Hauerwas sensed in the 1980s, as did Lesslie Newbigin (both influenced by MacIntyre) was what was later articulated by the editors of *Radical Orthodoxy* – that in the postmodern moment we were 'witnessing the implosion of secularism' and that this represented 'a moment of supreme opportunity for theology and the church'.⁷⁹ If we consider Forrester's work, while it made crucial connections between reformed theology and theologies of liberation enabling it to become a theology of resistance in the 1980s, what it on the whole failed to engage was the question of how theology could serve the church in Scotland within the new cultural landscape of postmodernity. The consequence of this failure was that with the brave exception of Storrar's *Scottish Identity*, reformed practical (or dogmatic/systematic) theology failed to produce a strong enough range of distinctive theological readings of Scotland as world at a crucial period in Scottish history. There was a failure to mobilise and utilise the resources of its Calvinist/Barthian inheritance in seeking to understand what was happening to Scotland – a failure to 'tell Scotland' as a narratable world in relation to the mission of the church.

Some of this can be related to the practices of practical theology – if you like to its 'means of production'. There were some striking and distinctive readings of Scotland and the UK which emerged from the work of CTPI but these were hardly disseminated and so had little currency within public, ecclesial or academic debate. There are grounds, however, for concern about a broader intellectual deficit within

⁷⁹ Milbank et al. ed. 1997. p1

the tradition such that reformed theology in Scotland lacked the strength in depth, the leadership and the cohesion to articulate a theological project of engagement with Scottish culture and society which could achieve a cumulative rhetorical/analytical force like that of *Radical Orthodoxy*.

This is despite the way in which other possibilities for reading Scotland and a broader Scottish tradition of social and political theory were made available through the work of Alasdair MacIntyre in both *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and in his 1988-89 Giffords *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, readings which were then developed by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull with striking openness to theological concerns.⁸⁰ Both Forrester and Fergusson have engaged MacIntyre's work, but only rarely with direct reference to its outworking in a Scottish context.⁸¹ Further engagement with, for example, the implications of his reflection on the theological basis of Scots law (one of the key themes picked up by Beveridge and Turnbull) at the moment when Scotland regained a law-making parliament remains an outstanding issue. What we have received⁸² from David Fergusson is a crucial contribution to a debate without enough voices in it. On the broader question of analysing Scottish culture and society in engagement with the wider range of postmodern 'continental' thinkers which the RO school are in dialogue with, the task has hardly been attempted. A further example would be the way in which Callum Brown's "made-in-Scotland" revision of secularization theory⁸³ has still not been the subject of a major response from a Scottish reformed theologian (or church historian).⁸⁴ Clearly there are also serious "supply side" issues at work here, but these simply add to the sense of a "thinning" of the tradition.

A salutary contrast can be made with the Dutch Reformed tradition in which the substantive legacy of Abraham Kuyper was further deepened and extended in the work of Herman Dooyeweerd, whose call for a Christian philosophy extended to a

⁸⁰ Beveridge & Turnbull 1995 and 1997

⁸¹ Forrester has a late essay in the 2000 collection *Truthful Action* in which he engages tentatively with MacIntyre's critique of the university.

⁸² For which we are 'truly thankful'.. (!)

⁸³ See Brown 1997 for the proto- Scotland-only version of the thesis and Brown 2001 for the UK wide version.

⁸⁴ Although Fergusson's discussion of "de-secularization" literature is a step in this direction.

call for the development of confessionally Christian approaches to work across all academic disciplines. This tradition which has been rather discounted in British theological circles (and has lacked an institutional support base) has been more influential in North America from the twin centres of Calvin College in Grand Rapids and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto.⁸⁵ Its influence was also felt in Evangelical circles through the work of Francis Schaeffer and through the publishing networks of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship/Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (IVP in the UK and America). The visibility of this tradition has been increased in recent decades through the acclaimed work of scholars such as Nicholas Wolterstoff and Alvin Plantinga⁸⁶ and it has recently become a key centre of reformed engagement with the *Radical Orthodoxy* movement. Following a joint Calvin/ICS conference on *Radical Orthodoxy*, Calvin professor James K.A. Smith published *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy* in 2004 and in 2005 the conference proceedings *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition* appeared, jointly edited by Smith and ICS professor James H. Olthuis.⁸⁷ Smith's introduction in particular, draws the work of Dooyeweerd into a fascinating critical dialogue with that of Milbank, Ward and Pickstock and offers a number of substantive challenges to major RO theses out of the Calvinist tradition. With due regard to the financial and institutional health of that tradition in North America, it remains noteworthy that no comparable substantive response to a movement originating in England has emerged from within the Scottish reformed tradition.

The need would then appear to be a double one: first, for a greater engagement out of the latter tradition with the theological questions being raised by the radical critiques of modernity and the social sciences found in the work of Hauerwas and the Radical Orthodox writers; second, for a more focussed application of the results of such engagement to questions of Scottish culture and society. What Hauerwas and the RO school point up is that it is not enough to frame a project as "public

⁸⁵ English scholars influenced by this tradition include the sociologists Alan Storkey (see his 1979 book *A Christian Social Perspective* published by IVP) and David Lyon and the political theologian Jonathan Chaplin. It was also a key influence on the founders of the Greenbelt Christian Arts Festival in the 1970s.

⁸⁶ Scheduled to be a 2006 Gifford Lecturer

⁸⁷ both books by Baker Academic, Smith 2004, Smith & Olthuis 2005

theology” at a time when the meaning and possibility of such a project has been so radically contested.⁸⁸ While both Forrester and Fergusson have criticised such approaches for overstating the distinctiveness of Christian discourse, neither of them have offered a theological defence of sociological discourse which addresses the specific challenges Milbank brings against it and the call from Fergusson for *greater* resort to sociology which was noted above, is presented in fairly bald terms. Despite his call for social theology to seek “new forms of engagement”, he presents the alternatives as greater attention to “sociological work” or the making of “impressionistic assumptions”.⁸⁹ Despite his recognition of and welcome for strong revisionist trends in sociology’s treatment of religion, Fergusson does not address the question of a more fundamental philosophical/theological crisis in the theoretical basis of sociology as a discipline.⁹⁰ In this respect, key questions posed by Hauerwas’ Giffords remain unanswered. Does Fergusson want to do ‘systematic’ theology in a ‘Barthian’ mode, but turn to Tillich for his ‘social’/practical theology? And if so has he told us why? Taking Hauerwas as an interlocutor for reformed practical theology in Scotland leads us (via Milbank) to a fundamental questioning of the theological uses of sociology and therefore, to a ‘radical’ challenge to the identity and methodology of practical theology.

church

The church, Hauerwas claims, is God’s new language.⁹¹ Sam Wells, we noted above, suggests that for Hauerwas, the church *is* his epistemology.⁹² The church is

⁸⁸ for critiques of “public theology” see Hauerwas 1999, 89-90; Long 2001 pp66-104; see also the work of Nicholas Wolterstoff, in particular in his 1997 debates with Audi on *Religion in the Public Square* Audi & Wolterstoff 1997 and in his essay of the same year “Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons” in Weithman ed. 1997, *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*; see also John Keane’s essay *Secularism* in Marquand & Nettler ed. 2000, 5

⁸⁹ Fergusson 2004, 160

⁹⁰ c.f. Milbank 1990, 102

⁹¹ The title of a 1986 essay, collected in *The Hauerwas Reader*, pp142ff

⁹² Wells 1998, 71; c.f. Rasmusson 2000, 186 on Hauerwas using ‘church’ where most academics place ‘theory’, ‘epistemology’ or ‘hermeneutics’

a social ethic. The church is a polity. This hyper-inflationary⁹³ tendency in Hauerwas' ecclesiology is targeted by, among others, David Fergusson when he charges Hauerwas with an "overdetermined" ecclesiology.⁹⁴

However, one (perhaps surprising) result of reading Hauerwas alongside Baillie, Fraser and Forrester has been a recognition of the expansive ecclesiological claims in *their* work, above all, in Baillie's work and in the reports of the Baillie Commission. The effect of this recognition is both to make Hauerwas' position seem less 'extreme' and 'alien' to the Reformed tradition in Scotland and to question whether these strong ecclesiological emphases are underplayed in recent theological discourse.

It is not hard to see why the substantial and rapid decline of the churches within Scotland since the 1950s should have provoked a 'deflationary' trend in ecclesiology and this means that support for Hauerwas and for the retrieval of strong ecclesiological positions within the Scottish reformed tradition runs the risk of being accused of a form of 'cognitive dissonance' or at least of wishful thinking. I noted previously Hauerwas' acknowledgment that "for many... to make the church the center of Christian life and thought seems either hopelessly idealistic or naïve, given the "empirical realities" of most churches particularly in America"⁹⁵, but also reflected on the potential attractiveness of his "ironic temptation" to those within Scotland's churches.

A difficult but necessary task which weighs upon theology in Scotland is to continue to venture theological readings of church decline alongside the numerous sociological readings. Hauerwas offers a typically forthright example in his 1995 essay *"The Church's One Foundation Is Jesus Christ Her Lord or In A World Without Foundations All We Have Is The Church"* when he claims that "God is killing Protestantism and perhaps Christianity in America and we deserve

⁹³ Subsequent to writing this, I came across John Webster's use of this metaphor in relation to recent developments in ecclesiology in an important essay "On Evangelical Ecclesiology" in the inaugural issue of the journal *Ecclesiology* 1:1 (2004) 9-35; the inflationary reference is on p11

⁹⁴ Fergusson 1998, 67; Fergusson's verdict is cited by Robin Gill whose 1999 book *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* is essentially a response to Hauerwas and further evidence of Hauerwas' impact on ethics and practical theology in the UK.

⁹⁵ Hauerwas 1995, 4

it”.⁹⁶ A similar reading comes in a recent essay on “The Public Church” by Hauerwas’ colleague at Duke, Reinhard Hutter:

The obvious internal failure of the Western church in modernity can be rightly understood as God’s judgment on the church’s unfaithfulness and unwillingness to take up the way of the cross in the violent struggles of the 16th and 17th centuries (with the notable exception of most of the left wing of the Reformation and the monastic communities). Thereafter, only the privatization of the Christian faith could allow a “peaceful” public to be envisioned and constructed. This “Babylonian exile” of the church into privacy needs to be reclaimed by the church as “church history” in the fullest theological sense.⁹⁷

Hutter’s call for an exercise in theological discernment is a call we might say for “the interpretation of God’s will in a time of crisis”.⁹⁸ David Fergusson has recently aired theological interpretations of church decline in a UK context, observing that “the loss of national status is perceived by some to be a gain... [due to] the greater freedom it lends to missionary endeavour and moral witness” but he declines to fully endorse such perceptions, adding “so it is argued”.⁹⁹

Hutter’s essay belongs within a developing theological debate which has already been referenced¹⁰⁰ about the interpretation of Barth’s ecclesiology, in which he is joined with Joseph Mangina, Nicholas Healy and Stanley Hauerwas as well as more recently John Webster.¹⁰¹ In his comparison of ecclesiological themes in Barth and Hauerwas, Mangina argues that:

Hauerwas’ agenda is that of discovering what it means to be ‘evangelically catholic’.¹⁰² His goal is to recover a sense of the social concreteness of Christ’s presence, a point simply assumed by classical Christian tradition, but subject to a profound eclipse in modernity.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Hauerwas 1995, 39

⁹⁷ Hutter 2004, 41

⁹⁸ The major options were presented by North American theologian Barbara Wheeler at a conference of Church of Scotland ministers in New College Edinburgh in March 2004, where she invited those present to indicate whether they favoured “hot” (theological) or “cold” (sociological) explanations of church decline, before firmly stating her own commitment to “cold” explanations in preference to Hauerwas’ “exciting” invitation to “jump aboard a moving train”.

⁹⁹ Fergusson 2004, 142-3

¹⁰⁰ see Ch 1 above for references to this and to Stout’s (2004) characterisation of it as a “substantive theological controversy”

¹⁰¹ *Ecclesiology* 1/1

¹⁰² Reinhard Hutter also uses this phrase to identify his project

¹⁰³ Mangina 1999, 283

Such a recovery of ‘social concreteness’, which Mangina elsewhere links to Barth’s affirmation that the church is the ‘earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ’ (IV/1 661)¹⁰⁴ can be seen as a variation on the older Scottish reformed theme of the ‘true face of the kirk’. It keys into classic theological controversies over the holiness the church is called to (and will be fully characterised by in the eschaton) and the church’s pilgrimage in history – controversies which render the church variously as invisible/visible, justified/sinful, ideal/real, normative/empirical. It connects also to the task of theological discernment of the church’s faithfulness and the role within that of the *notae ecclesiae*. Mangina suggests that Barth’s treatment of the church in CDIV/1-3 and especially in IV/2, describes the church in terms of what might be called a ‘politics of sanctification’.¹⁰⁵ The church is called to perform the faith, to display this politics – in Oxford 1937 terms ‘to be itself’ in particular times and places within history. It is called, in the words of the Baillie Commission, to *be* the interpretation of God’s will – in the much quoted words of Lesslie Newbigin, to be “the hermeneutic of the gospel”.¹⁰⁶

Taking its cue from these debates, a practical theology of church and world might therefore speak of (or be recast as) a ‘church pragmatics’¹⁰⁷ which specifies how the church’s witness achieves social concreteness in specific contexts or occasions¹⁰⁸. Duncan Forrester and David Fergusson point to the way this can take place through ‘confessional’ practices, as with the Barmen Declaration in 1930s Germany or the *Kairos* Document in 1980s South Africa. Reinhard Hutter suggests that in addition to Luther’s classic “inner circle” of *notae ecclesiae*, it is possible to formulate a more ‘contextual’ “outer circle” of marks, which specify the church’s faithfulness in terms of “constitutive practices” in a given historical setting.¹⁰⁹ For Yoder and Hauerwas, “non-violence” is such a constitutive practice. For Barth

¹⁰⁴ Mangina 2004, 155

¹⁰⁵ Mangina 2004, 144

¹⁰⁶ Newbigin 1989, ???

¹⁰⁷ Hutter 2004 34, Hutter speaks about ‘core’ or ‘constitutive’ practices which represent ‘the other side of doctrine’; I have not come across other uses of the term ‘church pragmatics’ although I suspect the term has been coined elsewhere.

¹⁰⁸ John Webster argues that the term “occasional theology” is to be preferred to “contextual theology”

¹⁰⁹ Hutter 2004, 34

resistance to Hitler, for Bonhoeffer solidarity with the Jews, for the authors of *Kairos* resistance to apartheid, for Liberation Theology solidarity with the poor and resistance to oppression are examples of such contextual constitutive practices.

Practical theology conceived as 'church pragmatics' suggests an alternative future for the Scottish reformed tradition which can be distinguished from the 'public theology' model embraced by Storrar and Forrester. It is neither a sub-division of 'public theology' nor a parallel 'inner' track¹¹⁰, but a different way of conceiving the relationship between the terms 'church' and 'public'.

From the beginning of the Christian era, the church's confession of Jesus as Lord challenged and relativized the authority structures of the Roman empire. While recognizing the reality of earthly powers and authorities, when it was faced with a choice the early church was clear that it must obey God rather than men.¹¹¹ When they were persecuted for that choice, early Christian witnesses and martyrs saw the heavens opened and Son of Man at the right hand of God, or they saw the slain Lamb at the centre of the throne. That resurrected man was the one who God had appointed to judge the world, that slain Lamb was the one worthy to take the scroll and open it. We find within the New Testament, then, what we might call an eschatological criterion of publicity or publicness. On the Cross, Paul writes: Christ, the head of every ruler and authority (Col 2:10) disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them. (Col 2:15) Recognising that to most observers, that public triumph would have been reckoned a public defeat, Oliver O'Donovan highlights the crucial importance of the Ascension of Christ for political theology:

..without the exaltation, [Jesus'] vindication can only be a personal affair, not in the realm of public achievement. This demythologising of the Gospel is, inevitably, a depoliticising of it, since political affirmations are classified among the religio-mythical concepts that must be shed.

¹¹⁰ c.f. Duncan Forrester's recent comments in "The Scope of Public Theology" in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17/2 (2004) pp5-6 in which he contrasts 'public theology' with the 'internal discourse of the church' p6

¹¹¹ c.f. Fergusson 2004, 16

The Ascension is the *foundation* which determines all future time...¹¹² ... in one sense it is a secret foundation, since that ultimate publicity has not occurred; yet in no sense is it a private foundation, but one which determines all public existence.¹¹³
 ...it determines the public existence of the church, which participates in the coming of the Kingdom and witnesses to it; and through the church it determines the provisional public life of the world¹¹⁴, in which the authorities are subdued, reformed and given a limited authorisation.¹¹⁵

It was only, therefore, the eyes of faith which *not* seeing all things subjected to God, could yet see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour. But what they saw, determined the public existence of the church and “*through the church*” the provisional public life of the world. O’Donovan’s “through” here echoes that of Ephesians 3:7-12 where Paul speaks of the grace given to him “to make plain to everyone the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that *through the church* the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”.

Another eschatological re-formulation of publicity is found in the work of Rowan Williams, who in his reading of *The City of God*, argues that Augustine is concerned about a “*redefinition* of the public itself, designed to show that it is life outside the Christian community which fails to be truly public, authentically political. The opposition is not between public and private, church and world, but between political virtue and political vice.”¹¹⁶ A similar teleological emphasis is found in Nicholas Healy’s ecclesiology where he argues that because “all other bodies [other than the church] do not appreciate the ultimate significance of Jesus Christ”¹¹⁷:

¹¹² O’Donovan 1997, 145

¹¹³ *ibid.* 146

¹¹⁴ This also recalls Barth’s image of the church’s relation to the state

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* O’Donovan continues: “...the primary eschatological assertion about the authorities, political and demonic, which govern the world, they have been made subject to God’s sovereignty in the Exaltation of Christ. The second, qualifying assertion is that this awaits a final, universal presence of Christ to become fully apparent. Within the framework of these two assertions there opens up an account of secular authority which presumes neither that the Christ event never occurred nor that the sovereignty of Christ is now transparent and uncontested.”

¹¹⁶ “Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*”, *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987), 58 quoted in Hauerwas 1999, AC 27

¹¹⁷ Healy 2000, 17

The baptismal claim, then includes the belief that the way of Jesus Christ, embodied in and taught by the concrete church, is, all things considered, better than other ways of life... Therefore insofar as it is the embodiment of that way of life, the church claims, to put it boldly, that it is superior to all other religious and non-religious bodies.¹¹⁸

The same case is also advanced¹¹⁹ by Stephen Long who claims in opposition to ‘public theologians’ Ronald Thiemann and Max Stackhouse that:

The social institution of the church is not a private religious institution, It should be for Christians the social institution that renders intelligible both our politics and our morality. It is already the most “public” of all institutions, so to assume that it should be ordered to something more public [e.g. the nation-state] will lead to a false and idolatrous catholicity... The church exists within a complex social order in which it is central.¹²⁰

For Long this means that we should never refer to the “public church” since “the church by virtue of its own life, is public.... The church is more than public; it is catholic, and that is its politics.”¹²¹ Hutter by contrast believes it is imperative that the church claims its identity as public and that theology speaks of “the public church” as a way of refusing the conditions of ‘publicity’ dictated by modernity. The public character of the church is, he argues, a *nota ecclesiae*¹²². Behind the opposing rhetorical strategies, however, there is agreement with Long that “the church’s essential marks of apostolicity, catholicity, oneness and holiness designate it as a public in its own right at all times and in all places”.¹²³

Drawing together these strands from O’Donovan, Williams, Healy, Hutter and Long, practical theology as ‘church pragmatics’ can therefore be distinguished from ‘public theology’ on the grounds of its assertion of the public character of the church by virtue of the determination of its life by the ascended Christ and by the catholicity which results from this determination. In agreement with Hutter and with the ecclesiologies of Baillie, Fraser, Forrester, Storrar and Fergusson, the church

¹¹⁸ Healy 2000, 15

¹¹⁹ Long offers the most uncompromising version of this already strong argument – I would not endorse his whole argument here.

¹²⁰ Long 2001, 80

¹²¹ Long 2001, 81

¹²² Hutter 2004, 20-21 “the church has to break out of the iron cage of privatism set up by modernity’s specific way of defining “private” and “public” in order to be fully the church”.

¹²³ Hutter 2004, 20

pragmatics advocated here is understood as a form of ‘ecumenical theology’ and a commitment to ecumenism as a constitutive practice of the church, when understood in Miroslav Volf’s sense of “the openness of every church toward all other churches as an indispensable condition of ecclesiality”.¹²⁴

Two caveats are in order here. It should be noted, first, that the practice of ecumenism is a reminder that the concept of ‘constitutive practices’ has a negative as well as a positive function, so that to avoid ‘unnecessary’ anathematising of other believers, something like Hutter’s distinction between an inner and an outer circle of *notae ecclesiae* must be maintained and, in fact extended, so that a clear distinction is made between practices which are advocated as *beneficial* (pertaining to the *bene esse* of the church) and those which are *constitutive* (pertaining to the *esse* of the church). Secondly, any emphasis on practice risks falling over into a legalism which undermines the principle of *sola gratia*. Here John Webster’s warning about the need to critique inflationary understandings of ecclesial practice should be heard.¹²⁵

church-world

John Baillie’s 1938 Swanwick address on “What is the Church?”, delivered in the immediate aftermath of the seminal 1937 Oxford and Edinburgh conferences was distinguished by the fact that he addressed the question more in “Life and Work” than in “Faith and Order” terms.¹²⁶ In its immediate historical setting, Baillie’s response, sharpened and strengthened by the extraordinary achievement of Oxford was a direct response to the rise of Nazism in Germany and the emergence of the Confessing Church. But as his text makes clear, Baillie’s approach points also to the severity of the problematic set for ecclesiology within post-Enlightenment Europe and articulated most influentially by Ernst Troeltsch in his classic *The Social*

¹²⁴ Volf, 1998 156

¹²⁵ Webster 2004 – “Evangelical Ecclesiology” in *Ecclesiology* I/1, 2004; (Is part of the promise of the debate over Barth’s ecclesiology that Hauerwas’ stress on practice might address some of the criticisms of ‘occasionalism’ and ‘abstractness’ in Barth’s ecclesiology, while Barth’s insistence on divine freedom and grace might prevent Hauerwas’ ecclesiology from sliding into ‘legalism’?)

¹²⁶ Baillie Archives, University of Edinburgh Special Collections.

Teaching of the Christian Churches.¹²⁷ Protestant ecclesiology since Troeltsch has been deeply self-conscious about its need to compete for ‘social space’ and has often been intimidated by the stark opposition created by Troeltsch’s two formal types of ‘church’ and ‘sect’. In ‘genealogical’ succession to Troeltsch’s work, Reinhold Niebuhr’s opposition between love/justice, private/public and H.R. Niebuhr’s ‘Christ and Culture’ typology have combined with Troeltsch’s analysis to construct and configure ecclesiological questions in ways which have sharpened that opposition.

In the case of Scotland, the Troeltsch-Niebuhr analysis was overlaid on a long and complex history of church-state/church-nation/church-world interaction. David Fergusson (2004) makes an important point about the need for contemporary articulations of the church-world relationship to escape from the binary church-state models of the early modern period, but the point may be weakened by the historical ‘compression’ inherent in the ‘then and now’ character of this comparison. Here, we become painfully aware of the need for continuing research *by theologians* into the tradition of ‘political theology’ in Scotland. What Reinhard Hutter calls “church history” in the fullest theological sense¹²⁸ and Nicholas Healy calls “theological history”. Healy quotes Pannenberg’s verdict that “In no other field has Christian theology given itself so unreservedly to a purely secular understanding of reality, detached from any connection with the reality of God as in its handling of church history.”¹²⁹ Healy’s argument offers an interesting parallel to the form of David Fergusson’s case for the importance of sociology, when he claims that:

Theological histories are written not in order to end inquiry, nor to structure all forthcoming inquiry, but to bring to light conflicting views and to stimulate debate. *If ecclesiology fails to produce these histories, the church’s concrete identity will be governed by unexamined construals of its history*, which are more likely to be controlled by unacknowledged interests and assumptions.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Troeltsch 1931

¹²⁸ Hutter 2004, 41

¹²⁹ (Pannenberg - Systematic Theology Vol III, Eerdmans 1998 p498) quoted in Healy 2000, 159

¹³⁰ Healy 2000, 161 emphasis added

...While theological history is necessary penitential, its primary concern, like that of individual confessional practice, is with the present and the future as it makes possible more truthful witness and discipleship.¹³¹

Baillie's 1938 text (and the parallel passages in the Commission reports) are strikingly reminiscent of parts of Oliver O'Donovan's *Desire of Nations*¹³², which I assume to be an important exemplar of what Pannenberg and Healy are asking for. Healy points out the need for theological history on both a grand and a local scale.¹³³ In this respect, while noting again the real distinction and distinctiveness of Baillie's contribution, honour must be paid to Will Storrar's 1990 *Scottish Identity* which was crucial in breaking this ground in a new generation, but has had to bear too much of the burden alone and has not produced the kind of cumulative critical theological debate which he must have hoped to initiate. Nevertheless, the combination of cultural, historical, political and theological literacy in Storrar's work – which he self-identifies as above all 'missiology' – has set an important precedent. Duncan Forrester has pointed the way here in his problematic but significant historical panorama "Reformed Radical Orthodoxy"¹³⁴. Paradoxically, perhaps, an important pointer comes from Edinburgh cultural anthropologist Jonathan Hearn in his book *Claiming Scotland – National Identity and Liberal Culture* (2000).¹³⁵ Hearn breaks new ground for both theology and political theory in his retrieval of the notion of covenant within Scottish history¹³⁶ and his work deserves a theological response.

In this vein, one key aspect of 20th century Scottish church history which merits a further theological reading in the context of this thesis is the 1921 enactment of the Articles Declaratory, which laid the basis for the union of 1929 (just before Troeltsch's work was first published in English in 1931) and in which the church-

¹³¹ *ibid.* 162

¹³² and even in places of Milbank

¹³³ Healy 2000, 162

¹³⁴ in *Truthful Action*, Forrester 2000

¹³⁵ Hearn 2000

¹³⁶ Fergusson briefly notes the potential of covenant language in parallel with 'common good' language, Fergusson 2004, 136-7

world relationship was given a highly distinctive legal articulation. Designed to heal the rift of the Disruption, the Articles aimed to secure the place of the church as national, while ensuring that it was ‘free’ in its relation to the state. The two jurisdictions of church and state, in what was seen by supporters as a magisterial reassertion of Reformed Two Kingdoms thinking, were characterised as “spiritual” and “civil”. I want to suggest that the acclaim which has been and often still is attached to this admittedly unique piece of legislation by the Union state is profoundly misplaced. One of the factors which emerges from Stewart J. Brown’s account of the period alongside that of social historian Richard J. Finlay¹³⁷ is the role played in mobilising support for re-union and fuelling the sectarian response to Catholics by the state’s recognition of Catholic schools in the 1918 education act (portrayed by angry Protestants then and still at times today as ‘Rome on the Rates’). While the sectarian backlash can be attributed to ‘the worst’ of reformed Protestantism, what consoled the rest and even ‘the best’ was the assurance of a continuing Protestant and Presbyterian hegemony within the ‘non-denominational’ sector. I have argued in chapter two, however, that Baillie and the Commission’s greatest misjudgement about the future of Christian influence in post-war Scotland lay in their assessment of the situation in education and their assumptions about the continuation of this hegemony in coming decades. I therefore suggest that in retrospect, we could read the settlement achieved in the Articles Declaratory as a kind of inverted Faustian pact, in which the Kirk voluntarily surrendered its social body in exchange for recognition of its right to its spiritual soul. In essence, the Articles were a political wager on a continuing Protestant-Presbyterian-Church of Scotland hegemony within Scottish society – a concealed claim to the body of the State itself, made in classic Calvinist terms. The wager was then lost, as under the conditions of modernity the spiritual-civil split of the articles moved inexorably towards a private-public divide, in which the church’s influence over education was eroded by the secularisation and the secularism of the state. Intriguingly, given

¹³⁷ Finlay 2004, Ch 1

Hauerwas' desire for Catholics to become more Mennonite, the Roman Catholic church in Scotland can be seen as having functioned in a way more analogous to a Radical Reformation church – it has maintained its own social body and through this its capacity to resist secularism in a way which has been denied to the reformed churches.¹³⁸

As illustration of the contemporary contrast between the two educational traditions, consider this 2004 list of their aims in the area of religious and moral/religious education published on a Scottish Executive web-site:

¹³⁸ c.f Fergusson 2004, 159 on the minister as chaplain in non-denominational schools; also Wright in Kernohan ed 1999, 37; for a perspective fundamentally even excoriatingly opposed to the one presented here, see Donald MacLeod's paper "Calvinism and the New Millennium" in Kernohan ed. 1999

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION: 5-14 CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

Aims of Religious and Moral Education: non-denominational context

The aims of Religious and Moral Education are to help pupils to:

develop a knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world religions and to recognise religion as an important expression of human experience;

appreciate moral values such as honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and concern for others;

investigate and understand the questions and answers that religions can offer about the nature and meaning of life;

develop their own beliefs, attitudes, moral values and practices through a process of personal search, discovery and critical evaluation.

Aims of Catholic Religious Education

The aims of Catholic Religious Education are to help pupils to:

know, love and worship God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel;

know and understand the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Catholic Church, which flow from the revelation of Jesus Christ;

develop their faith in the light of Scripture, Tradition and the teaching of the Church;

accept Christian moral values and live according to them;

investigate and understand the meaning and purpose of life, with the guidance of the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Catholic Church;

acquire an appreciation of other Christian traditions;

acquire an appreciation of some other World Faiths through an appropriate knowledge of their principal beliefs, spiritual values and traditions.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/religiousobservance/background_aims.asp

A similar case could also be made regarding the changing role of the Divinity Faculties in the Scottish universities, in which the hegemony of the Church of Scotland is also fading, with unsettling consequences for the church as it continues to entrust a considerable element of ministerial formation to an arrangement which is becoming increasingly dysfunctional. The relationship between church and state, here as in schools was in most respects based on 'use and wont' and dated from an era in which overwhelming Presbyterian influence made more customised arrangements unnecessary.

A further apparent consequence of the changing relationship of church and university is the increasing Anglicisation of personnel and research agendas, which despite the genuine enrichments it brings in many ways, appears to have uncertain consequences for the future of the tradition which has been considered in this thesis. It is at least debatable and probably unlikely that if the case for CTPI were presented today in the terms Duncan Forrester presented it in the 1980s that it would be or could be officially supported within the university. There are real 'practical' and strategic dilemmas for an institution like CTPI as it seeks to negotiate the changing funding landscape and establish its claims to relevance within the 21st century Scottish academy.¹⁴⁰

Reflecting on the models offered by all three of our historical examples, the church commission, the ecumenical study and training unit and the (ecumenical?)¹⁴¹ academic centre; all three models will continue to be part of the future evolution of the tradition of reformed/ecumenical theological work on church and society.¹⁴² Within the academy, study of the sociology of religion and the public role of religion are growth areas, even 'hot spots' in the wake of the intellectual and political shock waves caused by 9/11 and this is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

¹⁴⁰ A recent (2004) CTPI conference on *Citizenship Education in Scotland* was an interesting illustration of this, in its eagerness to demonstrate its value to Scottish 'civil society' it omitted to offer any substantive theological input to the topic at all; an example of theology taking away its own seat at the table?

¹⁴¹ The question mark is there because while CTPI clearly has ecumenical backing and participation, this term should perhaps be reserved for more clearly ecclesial initiatives.

¹⁴² Although at the time of writing, Scottish Churches House was facing a financial crisis and possible closure.

What is less certain, within a Scottish context, is the future of practical theology which understands itself as working in the service of the churches, in its relationship to the traditional academic institutions. Will the future for Church of Scotland theologians within the academy (assuming there are some) involve them behaving like politicians who have to jump out of the gleaming ministerial Mondeo and into the party Skoda, following protocols which insist on a clearer separation of theological identities than was necessary in the past?

Pressure in this respect may not all come from the side of the academy. The church too is likely to become increasingly concerned about the decline of its presence and representation within divinity schools and this will lead to pressure for institutional changes. In the case of the Church of Scotland, this is likely to include increasing recognition of educational institutions beyond the historic four, but may also include a more differentiated 'English' model in which the identity of the Church¹⁴³ Colleges and departments of theology become more clearly separated, but a symbiotic overlap of personnel and resources continues.¹⁴⁴ Either way, the trend seems set for a clearer separation of church and university functions in the future and this will have resource implications for the churches.

In my judgment Hauerwas' analysis and proposals have much to contribute to a theological reformulation of the church-world relationship in Scotland. The problem may be, as John Baillie said of Karl Barth, how to prevent the medicine being administered in merciless overdoses. The spectre of sectarianism is fading somewhat, although it is likely to be revived if proposals to revise Declaratory Article III gain broader support. Here Michael Banner's comments add clarity. Noting that Troeltsch's definition is an ideal type or stereotype he observes:

nothing turns theologically, so to say, on whether or not the honing of the definition places one within or outside the category. If the criteria are so reduced so that 'cognitive

¹⁴³ hopefully in some more ecumenical configuration

¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to note, for example, the model offered by the recent 'nesting' of the Scottish Baptist College within Paisley University and of Highland Theological Faculty within the University of the Highlands and Islands.

dissonance' with the host society is sufficient for one to qualify as sectarian, then so be it – if one wakes up to find oneself a sectarian it is not a cause for groaning....
 ..all that is going on is that a sociological description is mistakenly reckoned to be, of itself, an important theological evaluation.¹⁴⁵

My own proposals go beyond cognitive dissonance, but I judge that Banner's verdict holds as may David Fergusson's judgment that the charge of sectarianism "is usually false or meaningless". Despite his later comments about exotic options, in his (2004) discussion of Hauerwas Fergusson accepts that strongly counter-cultural approaches advocate not detachment from surrounding society but "a more dialectical form of engagement".¹⁴⁶

Previously in the chapter I have argued the need for a strong rhetorical-practical challenge to secularism and for the priority of an ecclesial perspective in theology. Here I want to add to that the project of *re-forming the social body of the church in Scotland*. Central to this, as both Forrester and Fergusson accept, is an affirmation of *the church as polis*¹⁴⁷ - as in Yoder's terms a *body politic* and one which needs to renegotiate its role within the emerging pluralist secular state in Scotland. What Christians may have been prepared to accept the state doing on their behalf in an age of hegemony and what they will accept in an age of minority are likely to be two different things. In particular the area of education is a crucial area¹⁴⁸ and one which, in line with Hauerwas I believe demands a new institutional expression within Scottish life. The direction of educational policy under the present Labour government is cautiously sympathetic to the role of faith-based schools, reflecting the broader existing provision in England where the Church of England remains a major player in both primary and secondary sectors. While the prospect of mainstream¹⁴⁹ Church of Scotland schools remains faint, one possibility is that in a more ecumenical era, the body of Roman Catholic schools could come in time to

¹⁴⁵ Banner 1999, 29

¹⁴⁶ Fergusson 2004, 100

¹⁴⁷ an expression always liable to be misheard in Glasgow!

¹⁴⁸ c.f. the comments on the moral formation of the children of the church in Fergusson 2004, 101

¹⁴⁹ At present, you have to be officially 'delinquent' to be sent to a Church of Scotland school

be seen as a common heritage of the churches.¹⁵⁰ On the more conservative evangelical, charismatic evangelical and fundamentalist wings of the church, there are also growing movements for the establishment of separate 'Christian schools' reflecting their particular theological emphases. The parallel demand for separate Muslim schools and for state funding of Montessori and Steiner schools also points to a more differentiated future for education within Scotland, which may involve a revised funding framework which makes church-sponsored initiatives (which are free at the point of access) more possible.

Already in 1985, we noted Duncan Forrester observing that disillusionment with state provision of welfare meant that the future of social welfare in Britain was likely to involve a shift towards greater provision of services by the voluntary sector. While the Church of Scotland handed its last hospital to the State during the Second World War, it has retained and developed a large network of care homes for the elderly and a small network of centres for those with drug and alcohol related dependency problems.

A more problematic area for churches working within urban priority areas has been the tension between their desire to engage in models of holistic mission and the pressures for these usually small and poor congregations to pursue state funding for welfare initiatives. The "equal opportunity" conditions attached to such funding has often tended to have a secularising effect on the ethos and content of such initiatives with the frustrating result that the need for the church to separate itself clearly from the programmes it helps to establish can end up undermining the holistic instincts which provoked their action in the first place.

Reference to such initiatives by local congregations and the crucial role assigned to them within Fergusson's analysis of the churches' future role in society¹⁵¹, also points up a major limitation of the tradition considered in this thesis. The scope and reach of reformed theological initiatives in relation to church and society issues has

¹⁵⁰ There is some evidence that increasing numbers of Protestant parents are sending children to Catholic schools in Scotland and that they are also favoured by some Muslim and Sikh parents for their non-secular basis.

¹⁵¹ Fergusson 2004, 149

persistently failed to connect with the churches at the level of local congregations. This belongs within a broader failure of the reformed churches in Scotland to address issues of adult Christian education and lay training effectively. Of the examples we considered, Scottish Churches House is the most relevant here, but its geographical location meant that it was restricted to gathering people for training and in the absence of its spawning a wider network of similar centres, no outreach programme was developed which was able to extend its work. This remains a pressing concern for the churches in Scotland, following the demise of the Open Christian College in the late 1990s. The identification of this area by Oldham, Oxford and the Baillie Commission as crucial to the future health and influence of the British churches remains as relevant today as it was then.

An ecclesial practical theology which understands the church-world relationship as determined above all by the *mission* of the church, will also want to explore that relationship in terms of the *discipleship* of church members. Hauerwas' insights point to a radical understanding of discipleship as 'education for citizenship' *within* the Christian *polis*. Fraser's work at Scottish Churches House remains an inspirational example here, as does the work of Hauerwas' fourth witness, Dorothy Day and the witness of such as Bob Holman in contemporary Scotland. Their example is also a reminder of the limitations of Hauerwas' examples in relation to social justice and solidarity with Scotland's poor.

Finally, the emphasis placed here on re-forming the social body of the church is explicitly not intended to suggest a refusal to engage with the broader political process in Scotland. Reform of the Articles Declaratory includes the challenge in terms of political theory to translate the notion of the spiritual independence of the Kirk into a broader theory of the limited state. This vision of a post-Christendom church in a post-secular Scotland seeks to position the Church of Scotland within a devolved Scotland as a part of civil society, formally and legally on a par with other churches and other faiths, while serving notice of its intention to participate vigorously within the democratic conversation about the future of Scotland and to

be engaged in the political promotion of its own intellectual, ethical and political agenda.

Conclusion

After foregrounding the theological work of Stanley Hauerwas, this thesis has examined the background, practices and animating theological ideas of three key initiatives in twentieth century Scottish Reformed theology for which the relationship between church and world was a central concern and drawn on Hauerwas' ecclesiology to offer a critical assessment of their significance. I have argued that each of the initiatives offers insights of continuing relevance to the present and future task of practical theology in Scotland. Finally I have charted a new direction for reformed practical theology, which seeks to integrate these insights with a revised version of Hauerwas' position to offer a critical orientation for future work on church and society questions within Scotland.

The thesis is therefore a hybrid of church history and practical/systematic theology. It seeks to do two things, in the first place to tell a story of past theological practice and, secondly, to offer a critical theological reading of that story which leads to a revised account of the practical theological task.

I have argued that at the heart of the Baillie Commission's renewal of Reformed social theology in Scotland there was a distinctive reformed and ecumenical account of ecclesiology which resonates with 'the new ecclesiology' of contemporary post-liberal and 'radical orthodox' theologians and a neo-Augustinian reading of history whose critique of secularism and insistence on a theological vision of the world similarly has strong contemporary resonances.

On the debit side, I have argued that John Baillie and the Commission's vision of a new (open) Christendom era and their accompanying defence of establishment and infant baptism demonstrate a failure to follow through on the implications of their ecclesiological thinking and their critique of secularism. Constrained by the Articles Declaratory as the basis of the 1929 union, they failed to address the anti-ecumenical implications of that settlement or to appreciate the negative

consequences of its division of functions between church and state. However, despite the significant limitations of their methodology and the narrowness of the Commission's membership, their work continues to represent the outstanding example of holistic ecclesial theology (integrating systematic and practical theology in the service of the church's witness) within the Reformed tradition in Scotland in the past century.

I have argued that the establishment of Scottish Churches House should be seen as an attempt to put Baillie's 'open Christendom' vision into practice as part of a dialogical mission among Scotland's intellectuals and a drive to equip lay people in Scotland to play a key role in the reconstruction of Scottish society. Consciously intended as a parallel to the continental 'evangelical academies', Scottish Churches House waged a remarkable campaign in the wake of the ecumenical failure of 1959 to hold the ecumenical centre of the Baillie Commission/Tell Scotland vision through a period of rapid social change and theological polarisation within and between churches.

While in certain respects its approach, under the direction of Ian Fraser, was over accommodated to secular culture and over optimistic about mainstream politics, its ecumenical orientation, its consultative methodology and its intimate engagement with a wide cross section of social and political concerns in Scottish life, as well as its resolute focus on lay people as key exponents of 'practical theology', all have enduring significance for the practice of practical theology in Scotland today.

I have argued that the appointment of Duncan Forrester to the New College chair of Practical Theology in 1978 revitalised the 'Baillie' emphases on the global and ecumenical dimensions of academic practical theology in Scotland and on its political and economic interests. Influenced by Latin American examples and inspired by the legacy of Tawney, Temple and Baillie, Forrester worked to develop an indigenous liberation theology which could resist the social vision of the New Right and the policies of the Thatcher government. From 1984, the work of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues brought together academics, politicians,

commentators and activists to present papers and conduct seminars and colloquia on a wide range of social issues. Forrester's Barthian instincts, his support for Liberation Theology and his sympathies with the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre reinforced his commitment to theology as an ecclesial discipline and his critical loyalty to the church. However, CTPI, reflecting its location within the academy, only partially exemplified its theoretical option for the poor in its own praxis and it is unclear how far an ecclesial vision of theology will fit with its future trajectory within the academy.

In the post 1989 political climate and in the maelstrom of postmodernism, Forrester's work has maintained its political and ecclesial emphases at the cost of adopting a 'deflationary' methodological strategy and a theoretical reserve. It has held open the breadth of the tradition in the face of critical challenges, rather than charting a clear direction for the future.

Taken together, these three clusters of theological practice are rich with examples and ideas which are of continuing relevance for practical theology. Here I want to highlight five in particular:

1. *The centrality of ecclesiology, conceived ecumenically, to the practice of theology*
2. *The crucial role of the laity as theological practitioners*
3. *The practice of dialogue with 'the world' and listening to 'the world' as constitutive of the church's mission in the world alongside proclamation*
4. *The need for practical theology and ecclesial practice to be oriented towards action for social transformation towards justice, equality and freedom*
5. *The crucial public role of the church within the liberal state and the need for churches and Christian individuals or groups to participate fully in the political processes of nation states and international organizations*

Despite his apparent distance from the tradition considered here, I have argued that there are important (and perhaps unexpected) areas in which Hauerwas' work supports and reinforces the insights of these three initiatives and their 'house theologians'. However, while Hauerwas would endorse some of these themes, his critique of liberalism also disrupts this tradition by insisting that it needs to be interrogated more rigorously in terms of the relationships it perceives between ecclesiology and liberal conceptions of rationality, justice and politics.

This disruption is what I have explored in chapter five above, where I have argued that Hauerwas' critique, alongwith the recent work of other theologians in dialogue with him, such as Milbank, Hutter, Long and Rasmusson, problematises the project of 'public theology' as a way of extending the tradition considered here and questions the method of correlation as a means of relating church and world within practical theology.

The key theological problem is how to articulate the church's "in but not of the world" existence. Hauerwas' claim that the church is not a character in the world's story and Milbank's claim that the church cannot finally be accounted for by any other narrative, resist modernity's privatisation of the church and its rejection of the truth of the gospel, by asserting, alongwith Yoder, the narrative priority of ecclesiology. The character of the world as 'public' is therefore exposed as not simply a 'property' marking out a larger social space correlative to the church, but as an imperialistic claim to determine the properties of all social space. This critique and rejection of publicity as an imperialistic discourse is echoed by other non-ecclesial writers, whose positing of multiple publics and counter-publics reveal how unstable the term has become.

The reading offered here of a Scottish tradition of theological work on church and society suggests that there are resources within this tradition which offer support for alternatives to 'public theology' as a characterisation of its future:

- The emphasis of John Baillie and the Baillie Commission on an ecclesiology which resisted sociological reduction and their convictions about the social and political significance of the ecumenical church
- The conviction of Ian Fraser, expressed in the work of Scottish Churches House that ‘a house of the churches’ rooted in the practice of a daily communal spirituality could create a distinctive and hospitable (no holds barred) dialogical space open to many different parties within Scottish society
- The positive role offered in Duncan Forrester’s work to a vision of the church as an alternative or prophetic community, whose practice performs a social and political criticism of the powers-that-be

Crucially, and these are the tensions we see Forrester wrestling with throughout the 1990s, the issues turn on the kind of claims we make for the church, the kind of critique we offer of liberal society and which dimensions of the church-world relationship we prioritise. In addressing these questions, I find persuasive the call of Radical Orthodoxy for a theology which is “more mediating, but less accommodating”. I accept also the project of theological discourse as a co-operative, collegial and irenic enterprise, which seeks to avoid unnecessary polarisation. Within the intellectual catholicity of church and theology, we are often dealing with relative judgments about where stresses and emphases should fall and critical dialogues need to maintain a continuing respectful attentiveness to the strengths of others’ positions and the weaknesses of our own.

My thesis is that the stress on ecclesiology present within the tradition but displayed more forcefully in the work of Hauerwas, Milbank and those associated with ‘the new ecclesiology’ offers practical theology a way of articulating the church-world relationship and expressing the social, political and cultural witness of Christianity within Scotland which is to be preferred to the rubric of ‘public theology’. Its appeal for practical theology in the face of church decline and the marginalisation of theological discourse within liberal culture lies not in a temptation

towards the comforts of “sectarianism”, but in its confession of the “ironic” character of the politics of Jesus and the reign of God. Its promise for practical theology lies in its claim to offer a narrative display of how “church pragmatics” can mediate a fruitful social, political and cultural imagining of the world Scotland is and the world it is called to be.

The early twenty-first century is a significant time of political reconstruction within Scotland, in the wake of the devolution settlement, which has seen New Labour ‘social democrat’ regimes in Westminster and Edinburgh attempt to deliver modest programmes of social reform against the backdrop of reduced expectations of the capacity of the ‘state’ to deliver significant social change.

Subsequent to the theological efforts of the churches in the devolution campaign, in which Will Storrar played a key role from within the Reformed tradition, both academic and denominational theology in Scotland have been quiet on proposals for the future of Scotland as a devolved nation. Academics are gravitating towards anglicised, americanised or globalised agendas, driven by their own backgrounds and interests as well as the pressure to publish for a wider audience. The main denominations are preoccupied with responses to their own numerical decline and financial shortfalls, leading them to focus on institutional restructuring and on congregational mission strategies.

A new era of practical theological work should be informed about and inspired by the examples considered in this thesis, but will also benefit from a critical engagement with the work of Hauerwas and the debates around ‘the new ecclesiology’, which crucially will not simply deplore the churches’ current preoccupations with their own life and work as ‘sectarian’ introversion, but affirm them as a vital stage in the move towards a new ‘post-Christendom’ social and political witness within Scotland.

Work towards such a witness should not seek to replicate the top down methodology of the Baillie Commission, but denominations and ecumenical groupings should aspire to the same degree of theological rigour and be emboldened by its confidence in the project of speaking to the church(es) about

Scotland and the world and speaking to Scotland and the world from within the church(es). It should not measure its effectiveness by whether it can gain the access to policy makers or draw together key segments of the (now vastly expanded) Scottish policy community to the extent Scottish Churches House did in the 1960s, but it should challenge itself to engage with Scottish and global concerns with a comparable breadth and concreteness and it should redouble its efforts to extend¹ practical theology by ‘reinventing it as the people’s work’.² Finally, alongside such broader strategies, the place and practice of academic practical theology should still be valued and the (continuing) work of CTPI serves as one vital part of the academic resource for this within Scotland. It should be recognised, however, in the changed cultural-institutional climate of the 21st century, that an ecclesial vision of practical theology may include the academic, but that academic versions of practical theology may not choose to prioritise or to ‘serve’ the church(es). The synergies between university theology and the church’s mission may prove more fruitful and enduring than I have suggested, but the need for the churches to strengthen their own institutional arrangements for practical theological research, education and dissemination, albeit in a federated relationship to the one or more of the Scottish universities, remains pressing. The resource implications of this may well seem daunting in a time of continuing decline for the Scottish churches, but it may be a more urgent priority for them and for the Church of Scotland in particular, than many of its left-over Christendom roles and reflexes within Scottish life.

¹ The concept of extension is used here in the sense of the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) programmes of the WCC among others.

² The title of Ian Fraser’s 1988 (1982) booklet is *Reinventing Theology as the People’s Work*

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